MOTHERS AND FATHERS

JULIET WILBOR TOMPKINS

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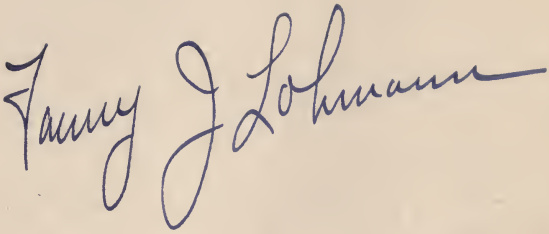
Mothers and Fathers



ALICE BARBER STEPHENS

MOTHERS AND FATHERS

BY

JULIET WILBOR TOMPKINS

NEW YORK
THE BAKER & TAYLOR CO.
1910

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THE TROW PRESS, NEW YORK

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Mothers and Fathers

"Ralph, Ralph!"

"Yes—what is it, Helen?"

"Isn't gas escaping somewhere? Can you smell it?"

"No; no, not at all. You imagine it. Have you been awake long?"

"Ever since the wind died down. It is so still, I can't sleep. I can't think of anything but Roy."

"I know. Didn't you think he was a little more—cheerful to-night, Helen?"

"No. He seemed to me half desperate. I could feel him crushing himself down into his chair, forcing himself to hold a book and— There! Don't you smell it now?"

"A little. I will see where it is. Helen, tell me—has he spoken of her lately?"

"Yes. Night before last. Just for a moment. Oh, curse her!"

"Hush, dear! These jets are all turned off. Did Roy go up to his room when he left the library?"

"I thought he did. The wind was raging so, I couldn't be sure. It is so terribly still now! Wait for me."

"Won't you stay here?"

"No. It will quiet me to walk about a little. I suppose one of the hall jets is turned on. Try this one."

"It is coming from the other end of the hall, Helen."

"Oh, then it is the one by Roy's room. How strong it is! You go so fast, Ralph, I can't keep up. Walk softly: we don't want to startle Roy. It is worse here—it makes me a little giddy."

"Helen, go back!"

"No! Keep away from Roy's door —you will disturb him. Here, I have found the jet—I knew just where to put my hand. I think it was turned on a little. I can't be sure, but I think it turned. Yes, I am certain it did. Some one must have put it out very

carelessly. Now we can go back. Oh, why don't you come?"

"Helen, I am going into Roy's room. Wait here if you will, but don't follow. Ah! Stand back—till I— There, it's off now. I'll open the——"

"Ralph! Roy! Why doesn't some one speak? Ralph, wake him up!"

"Roy isn't in the bed, Helen. He hasn't been in it."

"Then he went out. Of course he went out! Now will you come?"

"Dear, he may—be here. I shall have to feel. I don't dare strike a light yet."

"Feel?"

"The chairs, the floor. You said he seemed to you——"

"Why, you thought he was more cheerful, Ralph! You noticed it. You said so—didn't you!"

"I—don't know, dear. There is nothing on this side. I wish you——"

"Ah!"

"What is it, Helen? Speak!"

"No, no! It was nothing—only his coat on a chair. It—startled me. Go on; I'll lean against the window a moment. The gas makes me—don't stop, don't stop!"

"If only I dared light——"

"Ralph, I hear something! There is some one on the stairs. Listen!"

"I don't hear——"

"It is his step. It is Roy! Oh, God, God!"

"Yes, I hear now. Then it was the gale—it blew his gas out."

"Quick, Ralph, come away! We mustn't seem——"

"Hush! He will know by your voice. Let me speak. . . . Roy, is that you? Your gas blew out. Your mother and I have been airing your room. Good night!"

I

Weatherby's Mother

WEATHERBY'S mother looked distinctly guilty when he entered the room. She went on talking to her caller with the nervous fluency of one hastily changing the subject, and in an elaborately accidental fashion contrived to drop a newspaper over the open magazine in her lap. When Mrs. Carter had gone, she inquired solicitously about her son's day, avoiding his eyes.

"Mother," said Weatherby remorselessly, "you have been talking about my immortal works." There was amusement as well as resigned patience in his voice, but Mrs. Weatherby felt the irritation underneath and defended herself with flurried indignation.

"I did not, Howard! I had to. She brought the subject up herself."

"Didn't you just casually ask her if

she had seen the February magazines?" His tone was still bantering, but his forehead was slightly drawn and his eyes seemed to pierce the newspaper lying so artlessly on her lap. Mrs. Weatherby resorted to dignity. She laid the paper aside and placed the magazine on the table.

"I am sure I don't know how we reached the point, Howard. But when she asked me about your poems I could not very well snub her on the subject—as you do me. And she thought this extremely pretty, dear." The desire to mollify came uppermost again. "She said it was as good as anything Keats ever wrote. I don't see why you should always act so ashamed of your pieces."

"But, dear mother, if you would only let the public discover them for itself!" Howard said, wearily. "When you slug a nice, kind old lady with a madrigal, and then demand, 'Isn't that as good as anything Keats ever wrote?' of course she is going to say yes. She has been drinking your tea and sitting on your chairs—it's the least she can do. Only"

—his voice suddenly became serious, and even entreating, as he stood before her, long, thin, and gentle, hating above all things to give pain —"only don't you realize that it makes me rather ridiculous?"

Mrs. Weatherby turned to her unfailing help in time of trouble—hurt feelings.

"I am sorry if I mortify you, Howard," she said, very meekly.

Weatherby looked down on the plump, powdered face, handsome in spite of its injured expression, on the white hair coiling and puffing between its combs with an elaborate precision that someway suggested landscape gardening, and the stout figure in its tight and fashionable garments, and sighed to himself. But he was a good son. He kissed her and made affectionate fun of her, and she relented to his intention. Her dignity would have chosen a more deferential overture to peace, but she had learned to make sighing compromises in a long life with an irreverent child.

"How did your club meeting go off?" he asked, presently. "Any hair-pulling?"

"Very pleasantly," said Mrs. Weatherby, ignoring the latter question beyond a slight lifting of eyebrows at its questionable taste. "Mrs. Carter was made chairman of the next entertainment committee, and I and Mrs. Van Horne and Elizabeth Trent are to serve with her." Weatherby had lifted his head with a quick frown at the last name.

"What is Bessie Trent doing on that committee?" he exclaimed.

"Apparently trying to block our plans and make everything as difficult as possible," said his mother with tightened lips. "I have never forgotten, Howard, the way she scratched your face because you made a rhyme about her, and I don't think the past twenty years have improved her in the least. All the others want me to give a reading from Browning, but she seems to think that would not be sufficiently—entertaining."

"Well, really, you know," Weatherby began with cheerful energy, "Browning is rather—overdone, don't you think?"

"I realize that you don't like my reading, my dear;" his mother spoke with careful politeness. "But as the club does, and as you do not have to go to the entertainments——"

"Oh, I know," he said contritely. "It's a very harmless vice, dear mother, and I suppose you must have a flaw or two, to keep you human. Don't mind me—I'm a carping ass." And he rubbed his cheek against hers, then went to dress for dinner.

In his own room he paused at his desk and took from a drawer a little photograph, of a fashion ten years past. The face was full of young curves, the appealing roundness of sixteen, but he found there force, humor, and a trace of impishness.

"What a jolly mother you would make, thirty years older!" he reflected. "You would be so *on*, Bessie Trent! One could be intimate friends with a mother like you." Then he put away the thought as disloyal and dropped the photograph back again with a frown. The Elizabeth Trent of to-day was a more complicated problem than the school girl who had

given him her photograph, or the small child who had scratched his face.

A few days later Weatherby, coming home early, heard voices in the drawing-room and paused in the hall to reconnoiter. A voluminous flow of silk from a big chair suggested Mrs. Carter, and against the window was Elizabeth Trent's profile, looking so profoundly bored that he smiled to himself. Evidently there was a committee meeting in progress and his mother had been giving a sample reading, for the sonorous roll of her Browning voice came to him as he closed the front door, and a scattering fire of small compliments could now be heard.

"Wonderful!" "Oh, charming!" "And so perfectly rendered!" Elizabeth Trent said nothing, and Weatherby nearly laughed outright at the suppressed impatience of her face and attitude.

"Poor Bess! I know just how you're feeling," he murmured, with twinkling eyes. Then Mrs. Van Horne's voice fell on his ears with a cold shock.

"It must be beautiful to have such a talented son," she was saying. "I envy you, Mrs. Weatherby."

Weatherby stood rigid, the color slowly rising to his forehead. Oh, it couldn't be—she wouldn't do that! He moved cautiously till his mother was in range between the *portières*. In her hand was, not a volume of Browning, but a publisher's proof that he had been correcting the night before. On her face was a heavenly composure.

"Oh, Lord!" muttered Weatherby, helplessly. His eyes again sought Bessie Trent's bored profile, but he no longer found it amusing. The red in his face deepened and he was turning noiselessly to escape when his mother's voice arrested him.

"Yes, Howard has great talent. All the magazines are running after him," she said. "Now I am going to read you——"

Weatherby turned back in desperation and entered the drawing-room.

"Oh—am I interrupting a committee meeting?" he asked, pausing deferentially.

"Oh, no; we had finished," said Elizabeth Trent, rising hastily. His mother dropped the proof under the table and welcomed him blandly. When he had shaken hands with the others, he made himself face Elizabeth.

"Well, Bessie," he said nervously.

"How is the poet?" she returned. Her smile was all derision, and he found himself voiceless before it. "You came at the wrong moment," she went on. "You should time your entrances better. You have cut us off from a great privilege." She gave him a little mocking smile and left before he could answer.

He waited grimly for the others to go, resolved to settle this thing forever with his mother, with no weak relenting before hurt feelings. But Mrs. Weatherby, after a glance at his face, insisted on Mrs. Carter's staying to dinner, and when, after an interminable evening, Weatherby returned from taking her home, his mother had discreetly gone to bed. Not till the next evening could his attack be made, and then, unsupported by the freshness

of his indignation, he came off with a very poor victory. Mrs. Weatherby suggested that if he preferred she would never mention him in any way: perhaps that would be best: it was hard to teach an old woman new ways, and if her pride and affection were a trial to him—here she cried, and Weatherby felt like a plain brute. Presently he discovered himself begging her pardon, and gave up with a sigh of despair. He knew that it was unfair of her to cry, but he could not stand up against it.

A couple of weeks later Weatherby, wishing to refer to a small volume of verse he had published the year before, searched the house in vain for a copy. His mother gave them away so fast that there was seldom one on hand, and now even his private book case had been rifled. The next day he stopped furtively at a book store and asked for it, with a guilty stammer over the name. The clerk held out the little gray-and-gold volume for inspection.

"Yes, that's it," said Weatherby hastily. "I'll take it with me."

"Ah—so the poems are still selling?"

said a cool, amused voice at his shoulder. His start brought him face to face with Elizabeth Trent. He flushed miserably, then clutched at his self-possession and managed a rueful laugh.

"Bessie, I'd rather you had caught me picking a pocket!" he exclaimed.

"So would I," she assented, with a trace of sharpness. Peace-lover though he was, Weatherby could fight on occasion. He paid for his book with a new effrontery, then looked reflectively down on her.

"You scratched my face for one of my early works; and the later ones seem to affect you in exactly the same way," he said mildly. "I wonder why—is it poetry in general, or just my idea of it? I must have improved a little in the interval."

She recognized the challenge with a slight flush, but stood her ground valiantly.

"Your work has improved—yes," she said with meaning; "it is extremely good, for modern verse."

"Then it is I myself who have gone downhill?"

She shrugged slightly. "Oh, well, I don't believe I like celebrities. But others do —your name will be on every tongue at the club this afternoon. The applause for you will be quite as loud as for Browning—louder, even. It is too bad you can't be there!" She turned to go, with a somewhat trying smile and nod, but Weatherby did not notice. He was staring at her in growing dismay.

"What do you mean—about me—at the club?" he burst out. "Oh, you don't—it couldn't——"

She looked at him in surprise and her face unbent a little.

"Didn't you know that your mother is going to read from your works, as an encore—by unanimous request?"

"Oh, Lord!"

His sincerity was unmistakable. She laughed out, and the old friendliness suddenly dawned in her eyes.

"Why, I thought you would like it!" she said in frank relief.

"Like it!" he stammered. "*Like* it?

My good Bessie, my life is one long fight to keep my mother from making a public show of me. I have hurt her feelings, I've insulted her —and she won't stop. I'm perfectly helpless. What can I do?" All the bitterness of past struggles was in his voice. It was the first time he had ever broken out on the subject, and he could not stop. "You have no idea what she does, Bessie! She has special copies made on vellum and gives them round at Christmas. I caught her once reading samples of me and then of Keats to a select crowd and making them guess which was which! She's a dear good woman and she'd give her life for me, and I try to be big about it and find it merely amusing. But, by heaven, I can't. This has got to end. What time does your show begin?"

"At three. I am just flying home to dress."

"Well, I shall settle one number on your programme." And he left her with scant ceremony. But she smiled after him as she had not since the days of his obscurity.

A growing fear made Weatherby rage at the slowness of his car. Yesterday he had finished the first draught of a little drama in verse, the most serious attempt he had yet made. His mother had begged to see it, and he had laughingly refused, on the ground that this was his one intelligible copy and that he could not trust it out of his hands. His real reason was a certain divine shame that came with every new piece of work, a longing to treasure it in secret for a few days till the glamour of the hours of labor was a little dimmed and comment from without would not seem a hateful familiarity. His mother, of course, did not understand—could not have understood, even if he could have explained—and persisted, so, finally, being a good son, he had given it to her, with many exaggerated cautions for its safe-keeping. Then he had abruptly gone off for the evening. What she had wanted of it became every moment more certain and more exasperating. The club was to be honored with a first hearing.

She had gone when he reached the

house. Being on the reception committee, she had to be there early, he remembered. Weatherby made a careful search for his manuscript, knowing quite well that he should not find it; then, with set lips, turned toward the club. He had never been quite so angry in his life. For the first time he forgot that there was an element of the ridiculous in the situation. She had got to understand—if he had to leave home to teach her.

A block on the car line forced him to alight several squares from the club and he noticed with surprise that snow was beginning to fall. The sidewalks were already wet and slippery with it. At the door of the club-house he was told that his mother was not there: she had come and gone hurriedly away again. As he stood on the steps wondering what to do, the familiar family carriage of the Trents paused in front and Bessie came to his relief. She volunteered to find out where his mother had gone, and disappeared with a glimmer of amusement in her eyes; but this had quite vanished when she came back. She looked grave

and puzzled. It seemed his mother had been taking off her things in the dressing room, talking pleasantly with the maid, when suddenly she had given a little cry, looked wildly about, then caught up her wrap and rushed out without bonnet or gloves. She had given no explanation, but she had appeared deeply distressed.

They looked helplessly about. The drug store on the corner gave Bessie a dim suggestion. Could she have felt ill and gone there for some remedy?

"She does faint, once in a very great while," Weatherby admitted. "But surely she would have sent some one." Nevertheless they went in and asked.

Mrs. Weatherby had not been there, but the clerk had seen her, in a silk gown with no bonnet, holding a wrap about her with bare hands. He had been interested because she was so evidently distressed about something. She had hurried up to a policeman who was passing and they had talked for several moments. After receiving directions, she had

waited a moment for the car, then, finding the line blocked, had turned and walked hurriedly south. The snow had just begun.

South was directly away from home. They returned to the street in a silence that covered alarmed thoughts, avoiding each other's eyes. The policeman was not in sight, and there seemed nothing to do but to take the same direction.

In nearly every block some one had seen her, with the snow falling on her uncovered hair and her distressed face, hurrying recklessly. Once, when she had nearly fallen, a boy had caught and steadied her; she had not thanked him or seemed to notice. Evidently her whole soul had been bent on reaching some point.

"Bess, you must go back," said Weatherby suddenly, when they had walked half a mile without result. "It may take hours, and your feet are wet."

She did not trouble to answer. "Shall you tell the police?" she asked instead.

"Oh, not yet—I can't!" he exclaimed.

"What do you think, Bessie? Do you suppose she—" He could not say it, but she knew his thought.

"No, I don't," she said stoutly. "People don't lose their minds all in a moment. There is the power-house—let us go across and ask there. All those conductors standing about—" She broke off with a clutch at his arm. A door leading to the car company's offices had opened and there stood Mrs. Weatherby, pale but radiant, clinging to a white package.

"Mother!" cried Weatherby as they ran up to her. She did not seem at all surprised to see them.

"I have it, dear, quite safe," she called joyfully. "I have been over it and not a page is missing. The conductor picked it up just after I got out and——"

"Oh, mother! That wretched poem—why did you bother?" exclaimed her son, anger and remorse and overwhelming tenderness struggling in his voice.

"She is not well," said Bessie sharply.

He had barely time to put his arms about her before she sank limply against him.

They carried her to a drug store, and she was soon looking weakly up at them, while Bessie rubbed her hands and the young woman cashier fanned her with a magazine and her son hovered over her with brandy. Suddenly tears ran down her cheeks.

"Oh, Howard, if I had lost it!" she murmured.

"Mother, dearest!" he pleaded. "It wouldn't have mattered. I am ashamed that you cared so much about the thing—it wasn't worth it. I never dreamed how much you—you make me feel like a beast. Now I am going to telephone for a carriage and take you home."

"The club," she began, starting up. Bessie pressed her back again.

"Dear Mrs. Weatherby, I will see to the club: don't worry about it," she said, with unwonted gentleness. When Weatherby's back was turned, she stooped and kissed the older woman's cheek.

When Weatherby came back he found the cashier still fanning with the magazine and cheering his mother with conversation, while Bessie stood by looking pale and tired. Mrs. Weatherby, with returning brightness, glanced up at the brown cover fluttering before her.

"Is that the new March number?" he heard her say. "My son has a poem on the first page—you may have noticed it. It has been very highly praised." The cashier turned to the first page and was pleasingly impressed.

Weatherby glanced at Bessie, and she smiled at him with sudden tremulousness. He smiled back with misty eyes, and his hand closed over hers for a long moment.

"It was we who had to be taught," he said vaguely; but she seemed to understand.

II

Elsie's Return

"So Elsie will be back on Tuesday. Dear me, Mrs. Kennedy, how glad you must be."

"Yes; it's three months," assented Mrs. Kennedy, with a maternal smile.

"It must have been so lonely for you," went on a mother of five. "I suppose you can hardly wait. I am so glad for you."

"Well, I'm not glad Elsie is coming, at all," said a venerable voice. "It's the first time I have seen anything of Bessie Kennedy in twenty years. I know how it will be when that one chicken gets back."

"You have been so kind—all of you," said Mrs. Kennedy warmly. "I haven't been so dissipated for years."

"My dear Bessie, it wasn't kindness; it was grabbing our opportunity," protested the

venerable voice. "I wanted you for dinner on Tuesday night, to meet a charming young professor; but I suppose you won't come now."

"I don't think your young professor would appreciate the honor," commented Mrs. Kennedy. "You forget that I'm nearly fifty."

"And my young professor is fifty-five," was the triumphant answer. "Dr. Deane thought you most interesting. He talked about you much more than I thought necessary. Still, I know you mothers. You'll prefer Elsie's chatter to all the wise and delightful men on earth. Send her away again soon, won't you?"

"Indeed she won't," laughed the mother of five. "I know all about it, and I sympathize, Mrs. Kennedy."

There was bright color in Mrs. Kennedy's face as she walked briskly home, and she was still smiling a little as she shut her front door.

"People always did like me when I was a girl," she admitted to herself as she took off her bonnet before the hall mirror. "Dr.

Deane was really a remarkably interesting man. Dear me, what a blessing it is to have good hair when you're an old woman! I wonder how I should look with it pompadour!" She lifted the soft gray ripples and drew them together over the parting, looking critically at the effect. "But Elsie wouldn't like it," she added with a slight sigh; "and I hate fixed up old ladies, myself."

She turned into the parlor and lit all four gas burners, glancing with a faint air of apology toward a photograph of a young girl over the fireplace. She loved bright light, but Elsie would not have anything but the dimmest of muffled lamps, and she had kept dutifully to these, her book thrust well into their meager spot of light, until the kerosene had given out a couple of weeks before. The item had been on her marketing list every day since, but someway she had always forgotten it. She looked about the room with a guilty satisfaction in the vulgar blaze of gaslight, even while reminding herself that the kerosene must be in before Tuesday.

Old Kate summoned her to dinner with a benevolent smile.

"You'll be glad to have Miss Elsie back, ma'am," she said.

"Indeed I shall," agreed Mrs. Kennedy. "You must remember not to use onions after she comes, Kate. You know she can't bear them in anything."

"And she'll be wanting sherry wine in the pudding sauce again," Kate added.

"Yes; I'm glad you thought of it. And you must get out the salt cellars and spoons. Miss Elsie would be terribly shocked at this shaker," Mrs. Kennedy said, comfortably sprinkling her soup. "Suppose you give me corned beef and a little cabbage to-morrow night, Kate. This will be the last time we can have it."

It was a pleasant little meal, with the cheerful gaslight irradiating bright silver and clean linen. The stimulation of the afternoon was still with Mrs. Kennedy, and the room seemed full of approving presences. She smiled often to herself, and once or twice repeated

half aloud some little speech of the afternoon. When she left the table, there was a gentle dignity in her carriage, as though others had risen to their feet and some one had sprung to open the door. Back in her bright parlor she sat with her open book in her lap, looking contentedly about her.

When the doorbell rang, she started instinctively to escape to the dining room, but then sank back, remembering that it could not be any caller for Elsie. Kate brought in Dr. Deane's card and Dr. Deane himself at the same minute.

"You have not forgotten that you said I might call, have you, Mrs. Kennedy?" he began.

"I am glad to see you remembered it," she said with a touch of shyness in her cordiality. She felt a trifle conscience stricken about the four gas burners, but the doctor was not visibly shocked; and it was a comfort to see the person you were talking to. He stayed two hours, and they discussed the wonders of modern science, and the Panama Canal, and the

earthquake in Japan, and early days, and indulged in anecdotes to an extent that made Mrs. Kennedy glance uneasily at Elsie's photograph, as if it might betray this lapse from discipline to that stern young judge of conversational ethics. When he rose to go, they said charming things to each other, with stately little inclinations of the head to mark the compliment paid.

"And you must let me congratulate you on the prospect of regaining your daughter," he said at the door. "It must make you very happy."

"Indeed it does," assented Mrs. Kennedy. When he had gone, she picked up the photograph and dusted it very tenderly. Then she put out the four lights and went up to bed with a book under her arm.

"Any little excitement makes an old person lose her sleep," she mused, as she propped herself up in bed to read. "Dr. Deane is really very cultivated. I don't know when I have enjoyed any one more." She stared thoughtfully into space, with her finger

in her book, till twelve o'clock startled her back to the duty of sleep.

Elsie came on Tuesday afternoon, her hair done in a new way, her accent a little altered, her clothes indescribably changed.

"They wanted me to stay another week, and I was dying to, but it didn't seem right to leave you alone any longer," she explained. "What have you done to the curtains? They look so stiffy and funny." She shook them out experimentally. "Have you been dreadfully doleful?" she asked.

"Why, I missed you, dear, of course," said her mother; "but I went out a great deal, for me. I really was quite gay."

"Oh, I knew people would be nice to you and invite you, when they heard you were alone," assented Elsie. "I wish you hadn't had that gown made till I came, mother. The skirt is last year's cut, and it fits so badly—right here. See, that seam ought to come this way."

"Why, I thought it looked very well," said Mrs. Kennedy, gazing down in gentle anx-

iety. "I'm sure Mrs. Frith took a great deal of trouble."

"Frith is an imbecile, if you don't direct her," said Elsie decidedly. "And you know, mother, you're dreadfully unobserving about clothes. I hope you haven't bought your bonnet."

A look of guilt came into Mrs. Kennedy's face, though she tried to cover it with an expression of dignity.

"My clothes are quite well enough, dear, for an elderly lady," she said. "Don't you want to come out and see the garden? I have done a great deal of planting."

Elsie hesitated.

"Do you really want me to?" she said reluctantly. "I know you do. Well, I'll go. I'll get my hat."

She went up stairs, and Mrs. Kennedy stepped out into the spring sunshine, her gown caught up in front and trailing generously behind. Some one was coming up the path. She went forward smiling when she recognized Dr. Deane.

"I was passing, so I ventured to intrude long enough to ask about the daughter," he said over her hand. "I trust she arrived in safety."

"Yes, very well, thank you," she answered cordially. "She has had a very happy time."

"And now she is making her mother very happy," he went on, as Elsie came down the steps. The girl paused, then sauntered forward with a little nod.

"Oh, how do you do, Dr. Deane?" she said. "Are you admiring our flowers? Every one who goes by stops—perfect strangers, even. We are getting quite vain. Mother, you ought not to stand here in the sun."

"Don't let me keep you," said Dr. Deane hastily. "I thought, perhaps, Mrs. Kennedy—some night next week—if you——"

"Oh, I'm afraid we're very much tied up," said Elsie pleasantly. "When one has been away so long, you know——"

"Yes, of course. Well, perhaps, some time—but I mustn't detain you." And Dr.

Deane stepped nervously into a flower bed, and tried to open the gate the wrong way.

Elsie looked after him with lifted eyebrows.

"How did the man come to call on me?" she exclaimed. "Dr. Dufferin Deane, of all people!"

Her mother hesitated.

"I think it was on me, dear. I met him at Mrs. Long's one night."

Elsie laughed.

"You poor thing—I know him. He's a horrible old bore. Everybody calls him Dr. Duffer Deane. He's the kind that comes three times a week, if you're civil to him. I'll get rid of him for you. I can do those things beautifully. Didn't you see how I managed it then?"

"I don't believe—it will be necessary. He probably won't come again," said Mrs. Kennedy, with a slight effort. When she went to her own room, later, Kate was there with the clean clothes.

"The house will be a different place for

you now, ma'am, with Miss Elsie back," said the old woman kindly as she passed out.

Mrs. Kennedy's smile faded as the door closed, and she looked at herself in the glass with an air that was both startled and ashamed.

"God forgive me for a wicked old woman!" she said solemnly.

III

The Real Tragedy

"THIS air, my dear Imogen! Drink deep draughts of it, as I do! Doesn't it expand your whole being?"

"It is very clean and nice," assented the girl, plodding steadily up the rocky slope.

"'Clean and nice'! It's the champagne of the gods—iced vitality! How is that for a phrase? Iced vitality! Fits it very well, I think. Pause a moment and look back, my dear; you don't want to miss an aspect of this. See the purple shadows on those great mountain flanks—no, mauve, I should say; a warm violet. And the river like a silver ribbon woven through! And then that patch of sun on the green of the valley—just the right touch of vivid color. Wonderful!"

The girl paused, planting her stick to steady herself. Her eyes wandered over the

wide range of country beneath them, then rested a moment on the thin little gray figure, with one arm pointing shoulder high, and sparse beard swept to one side by the wind.

"Yes; but we must not stand here; we shall be chilled," she said.

He turned to follow her with a laugh of fond reproach.

"Always practical, Imogen! I wish you could get all this as I do. Every cloud shadow, every bird song, gives me a keen thrill of delight. The artistic temperament is a marvelous blessing—even to a business man. Forty years in an office can't wholly stifle it, you see."

"Yes, it must be," was the somewhat dry answer.

"Your mother has it, to a certain degree. I don't see why it was denied you so completely. My dear, I saw you face one of the most perfect sunsets imaginable for ten minutes last night—a sea of rose and opal, barred off with gold, and, above, little tender flecks of cloud, like silver boats; it fairly brought tears

to my eyes. And yet not a change crossed your face; you did not even comment on it. I am not reproaching you, my dear daughter, but I can't help grieving at what you miss."

"Oh, I think I get—enough," said Imogen, a little impatiently, her eyebrows meeting in a sharp frown. "This seems to be the top of the slope. I don't believe we had better go on to the next to-day."

They had reached a grassy plateau, held by a few old and stunted oak trees, all bent in the same direction by the wind. Mr. Wallace stretched out his arms with widespread fingers and drew his breath with a deep "Ah!" of delight.

"'The leaping from rock up to rock, The strong rending of boughs from the fir tree,'" he quoted. "If I had been a poet, I should have written that myself. Not being a poet, I left it to Mr. Browning, and he did very well—very well. I am perfectly satisfied. See how all the trees are bending in obeisance to us—the invaders! Sirs, we return your salute!" He offered a majestic sweep of his arm to the

stooping trees, then smiled round at his daughter; but she was looking fixedly in another direction.

"Perhaps we'd better be starting down," he went on, with his unwavering geniality. "Your mother will be lonely if we stay too long."

"You are always so lovely to mother," said the girl quickly. She seemed glad to say it, as if the acknowledgment lightened some burden.

"One marries for in sickness as well as for in health, my dear. There is nothing I hold more sacred than love. And when a pure, good woman has given herself into a man's keeping, the least he can do is to surround her with his care. See this lovely little flower, Imogen—such an innocent, pearly little thing! I think we must take it home and press it—or no, let it live its life out here, under the sky, where it belongs. That would be the kindest and best."

The involuntary frown had come back to Imogen's face. She put up her fingers and

tried to smooth it away, with a sigh for the hopelessness of the task.

On the way down they gathered some trailing green vines, already tipped with autumn red, by way of carrying the woods to Mrs. Wallace. She lifted a thin, lined face from the sofa as they entered.

"You're back," she commented.

"Yes, dear. Such a beautiful walk! I wish you could have shared it with us, Fanny. I will tell you all about it."

"That is so exciting, when you can't stir yourself," said the invalid with a nervous laugh, discordantly loud. Imogen had picked up a card that was lying on the table, and now held it up to her mother.

"When did he come?" she asked.

"Soon after you left. Ella was giving me my massage, so I couldn't see him. Wasn't it just my luck! I don't care especially for Mr. Knight, but he is better than nobody to talk to. The afternoon seemed about a year long." And she repeated the high, hard laugh, that seemed as involuntary as a cough. It had

come with her invalidism, and was an automatic testimony to the fact that she was a Christian, and, therefore, if she said sharp things, they were to be understood merely as jocular.

Imogen went to her own room, still holding the card. The last outburst of a flaming sunset drew her to the window and held her till its fires had quite died away; but even then her expression would not have satisfied her father—certainly there were no tears in her eyes, and he would not have noticed that when she turned away, the card in her hand was broken and crumpled. She smoothed it out with grave care and put it in her top drawer under some laces.

When she went down to dinner a man came in from the hotel porch, where he had evidently been watching the stairs.

"I carried out my threat, you see. Here I am!" he said. "Can you stand me for three or four days?"

"Oh, I dare say," answered Imogen with a half smile.

"We are more than happy to see you,

Mr. Knight." Her father shook the young man's hand in both his. "My daughter does not mean to be uncordial. It is merely her way of expressing herself—or not expressing herself." And he smiled with humorous reproach at Imogen, who turned serenely toward the dining room without answering.

"Oh, I can always count on you, Mr. Wallace," said the young man, with the vague smile of one who feels friendly, but has no attention to spare at the moment.

After dinner Imogen and her guest strolled out into the grounds, silvery with moonlight, while Mr. Wallace, with gentle, tiptoe haste, went back to his wife.

"I don't see why they can't come up here and talk," she said plaintively. "I wouldn't interrupt them. Just to have something going on in the room is a relief when you are tied to a sofa. It doesn't seem to me it is asking so very much."

"I will go and suggest it to them. I am sure they would be more than willing—they probably feared to disturb you, my dear."

And Mr. Wallace went back with single-minded zeal.

They came at once. Imogen sat in a low chair near the open window, her eyes on the dim lines of the mountains, while Mr. Knight talked to her mother—or listened, with polite comments at intervals. Imogen sometimes wondered why her mother kept such an exacting record of her various callers, for she never showed the slightest interest in them as individuals, or seemed to regard them as anything but receptacles for her nervous, eager talk. Surely it could not matter very much upon whom this was poured out. Yet she had a sharp resentment for those who failed to come in their proper turn. After an hour Mr. Knight rose, with a questioning look at Imogen which she apparently did not notice. She did not even leave her chair or offer her hand in response to his good night.

"Very nice, manly young fellow. I like him," commented Mr. Wallace. "I invited him to join us on our tramp to-morrow. Dear me, we shall sleep without rocking to-

night, we mountaineers. I could begin this minute."

"Oh, then I suppose you don't want to read to me," sighed his wife. "My head has been aching all the evening. I thought he would never go. Of course, if you would rather go to bed——"

"Certainly not, Fanny. I shall love to read to you. I am never averse to the sound of my own voice, you know." And with a sly laugh he rubbed the sleep out of his eyes and pulled his chair to the light with valiant alacrity.

At home Mrs. Wallace was accustomed to having several daughters very much at her service; so Imogen's morning was a busy one, and she did not see Knight till they started for their climb. The keen, fresh air, the freedom of her short skirt, the unmistakable meaning of this man's presence, sent her spirits up with a bound and suffused her with a great kindness. She laughed spontaneously at one of her father's persistent little witticisms, and even forgave him his elation at its success. Afterwards she forgot this, but she remembered how he had

turned back at the last moment to be sure that his wife was comfortable, and that she would not rather he stayed with her.

He led the way up the rough ledges, declaiming poems that honored such scenes, and calling for their admiration at every new aspect of the view as eagerly as if he were responsible for its success. Whether he broke in on their talk or their silences, they answered him cheerfully, and turned obediently as he pointed; nothing could really interrupt or mar the beauty of that hour for them. Imogen once heard herself call her father "dear," and she remembered this afterwards with passionate gratitude. Certainly it was a happy afternoon for him; and the end came so swiftly, so utterly without warning, that scarcely a second could have been darkened. They were still beneath him when he reached the top of the cliff, and saw him lift his arm in admiration of the mountain ranges beyond, drawing back a fatal step. An instant later, he lay somewhere below, in the shadows of the precipitous rocks.

"Wait here—let me go," Knight im-

plored, but Imogen was already flying down the path. They did not find the terrible thing they dreaded. He had fallen on a merciful strip of grass, and might be still living. Imogen sat beside him till Knight came back with men and a stretcher, then started to hurry ahead and warn her mother. He caught her back.

"I told her, dear; and she was wonderful. You needn't be afraid for her." Then for the first time Imogen seemed to weaken a little, and leaned against the bank to steady herself, but only for a moment.

Mr. Wallace died the next afternoon, without having regained consciousness. When everything was attended to, and there was nothing to do but wait for the early morning train, Imogen slipped out of the hotel by a side door and turned toward the mountains. She had not slept, and had scarcely eaten since the day before. It seemed as though another moment inside those walls would drive her mad. She mounted desperately, not noticing where she was going at first, but not shrinking when she discovered. The grass where he had fallen

was still crushed, and she stood looking at it dry eyed, too dazed and tired to feel anything but a dreary surprise at her own insensibility.

Some one came scrambling down from the cliff overhead and stopped with startled abruptness on finding her there. She looked up, and was remotely aware of a boy in golf stockings, who had lifted his cap and was evidently planning to speak.

"I hope I didn't startle you," he said. "I was just—did you know there was a man killed here yesterday?"

"Yes, I knew it," Imogen heard herself say.

"I thought I'd come and see the place," he went on. "He wasn't at my hotel, but a friend of mine had met him—said he was rather an old goat; but I don't suppose that made falling off any pleasanter."

"Yes; that is what the world would call him." She spoke with sudden bitterness. The boy's face expressed an anguish of dismay.

"Oh, did you—know him?" he stammered.

"No; I never really knew him," she answered after a pause. His flaming color began to subside, and he gave a laugh of noisy relief.

"I was scared for a moment," he admitted. "I thought I'd made a break. If you are going my way——"

"No, I shall rest here for a while. Good night."

"Well, good night."

When he had gone, she flung herself down in the grass and crushed her face against her arm. She was still sobbing exhaustedly when Knight found her. He knelt beside her and gathered her into his arms.

"Dear, dear girl," he said brokenly. "I was afraid you would be here. This terrible tragedy——"

She drew away from him and pressed both hands to her face with a despairing movement.

"Oh, this isn't the tragedy!" she cried. "This was just his death. It was his life that was the tragedy—don't you understand? He

did so long for sympathy, intimacy, and no one ever gave it to him—ever. I tried to be a good daughter; oh, I did try, Richard! But it was only negative—it was setting my teeth and not being actively disagreeable. I was always chilling him. He wanted to share our lives and feelings, and we never let him for a moment. I couldn't! And yet for just a little warmth and approval he would——"

"Dearest, don't! You must not reproach yourself so. You——"

"Oh, no; it was inevitable. If he came back now, I should be just the same," she said drearily. "He was a saint in all that he did—oh, if you knew his devotion to mother!—but he was—ridiculous. We knew it; every one knew it—perhaps he knew it, too. But he couldn't face it, or give up the hope of applause. He would make those terrible little jokes, and almost pray that some one would laugh—and no one ever did. And he would feel things that poets feel, really feel them—and then, too, he was ridiculous. And nobody would feel them with him. All the time good and faithful and

sincere—and all the time struggling, struggling for the little things that we throw away on anybody, but that we couldn't give him. And always ridiculous! Oh, that's the tragedy that is — killing — me." She dropped her head again. He put his arm about her shaking shoulders and drew her back to him, tears running down his face.

"It couldn't be helped, my poor girl. We can't change what we are. You mustn't blame yourself."

She lifted her head with a certain fierceness.

"There is just one thing in this world that will comfort me for his life. And do you know what? It is to have children of my own who will grow up and begin to bear with me; and listen to me with obvious patience, because it's their duty; and shrink at my ways, but dutifully hide it; and give me little forced smiles when I wanted a laugh; and take turns sitting with me so that I won't feel neglected, all the time holding the door between us tight shut—then I shall be getting it back, and I'll be glad,

glad! It's the only way the burden can ever be lightened. Don't you see?"

He drew her closer and kissed her very gravely.

"Things work themselves out, dear—one way or another," he said.

IV

The House to Themselves

EVERY time Edy rocked there was a screaking protest from the wardrobe, and a little more of its varnish was yielded up. After a few moments she jerked her chair impatiently to one side; but at the next rock she was brought up with a sharp jar, as the end of the rocker caught under the side of the little white iron bed. She jumped up in exasperation, and, after studying the tiny room with resentful eyes, set her chair in the one spot where it had space to move freely.

"And to think of all those nice, big rooms downstairs," she muttered, stooping for her thimble. She hit her head against the wash-stand as she came up, and a half-smothered "Oh, dear!" burst from her.

"What's the matter?" asked a brisk voice from the doorway.

"Mamma, I'm tired of having boarders all over our house," Edy declared. "Let's send them packing, and have those good, big rooms for ourselves."

Her mother smiled as she laid an armful of clean clothes on the bed.

"Let's," she agreed cheerfully. Edy smiled back.

"Now, most people would have reminded me that we'd have nothing to live on, if we did, and that we ought to be very thankful for the old boarders," she said. "You're so nice."

"Well, I guess you know all that," admitted Mrs. Williams. "I'll finish these stockings if you like. I've got my dessert all made, and Pauline is helping with lunch."

"No, you won't," declared Edy. "Go and rest a while. What's dessert?"

"Suet pudding—and a mite of custard for Miss Anderson, because she don't eat the pudding."

Edy frowned.

"Fussy old thing! Couldn't we give

up some of them if we sell the farm?" she added.

"Not at the price they are offering," answered her mother, turning to go. "'Twouldn't— Looking for me, Lida?"

"There's a gentleman down in the parlor, ma'm."

"Well, I haven't a room vacant," said Mrs. Williams, half to herself, lifting cautiously inquiring hands to the neatly waved gray hair that rippled across her forehead from a part of suspicious straightness.

Edy finished the stockings just as the lunch gong sounded, and distributed them on her way downstairs. A voluminous woman, handsome and richly dressed, overtook her and laid a much-ringed hand on her shoulder.

"Such an industrious little person," she commented, smiling affably. Edy twitched her shoulder slightly, and frowned in the other direction.

"Oh, yes, I've been busy," she said in a manifestly unwilling voice. She was spared any further strain on her manners by Pauline,

who came running up the basement stairs, flushed and pretty, putting the links into her shirt cuffs, which had evidently been turned back.

"Another busy girl," beamed Mrs. Bartlett, stretching out a second jeweled hand. Pauline met the overture with great friendliness, and smiled up at the somewhat majestic figure.

"Oh, Mrs. Bartlett, what a lovely new blouse!" she exclaimed. "Edy, doesn't she look too stunning?" But Edy had escaped, and was pouring out tea for a young man who had taken his place at the long table and was calling loudly for food.

"When a fellow has only twenty minutes to eat, and you keep him waiting nineteen, he doesn't have the pleasant, reposeful meals that the doctors advise," he was complaining. Edy brought him his tea in unruffled serenity.

"Mr. Berry, you've made that remark every noon for four years and seven months," she commented. "Why don't you change it?"

"Because I'm always hoping you'll

think of something bright to say back," he returned. "Most people could work up a very decent repartee in four years and seven months."

"I've had other things to think about," Edy answered.

"Oh, do keep the peace for one meal, you two," interposed Pauline, taking the head of the table. "Edy, Mrs. Bartlett wants her tea. Oh, Miss Anderson, you don't eat chops; your poached eggs will be up in a minute. Mr. Berry, have you everything?"

"Everything in sight, thank you. But I'd like another potato if it isn't extra."

"No, they're free on Wednesdays," said Edy. "Where's mamma, Pauline?"

"Why, she went flying off, just after that man called. I don't know what was the matter, but she was wildly excited. She started with two white waistbands streaming down in back; I had to run half the block after her to fasten them. And she had both gloves for the same hand. All she'd say was that she was going to see Uncle Daniel."

"Dear me, then it's something about law," commented Edy.

"Well, if I'd known she was going to call in a lawyer, I'd have paid up long ago," said Mr. Berry, holding his napkin high in front of him to fold it. "No, Miss Edy, you needn't offer me cut up peaches now. Two minutes ago, I'd have taken them gratefully, but now you're welcome to them all yourself. People carrying saucers of peaches are not allowed on the Fourth Avenue cars."

"Would you like some saved for your dinner?" Pauline called after him.

"What's dessert?"

"Suet pudding."

"Lots of raisins in it?"

"Lots. I stoned them myself."

"That's good enough. Let Miss Edy keep her old peaches." And the front door slammed.

"You spoil him dreadfully, Pauline," Edy complained.

"Oh, spoiling's good for people," Pauline answered easily. "Miss Anderson, if you

don't want peaches, you can have some preserved cherries just as well as not."

"Oh, no; I won't trouble you. I can get along very well without," said Miss Anderson patiently.

"One never has to 'get along without' in Mrs. Williams's household," said Mrs. Bartlett graciously. "I'm sure everything is always most generous. Ah, Lida, you saved that éclair for me? How very kind!"

It was nearly dinner time when Mrs. Williams came back. She looked flushed and tired, and the ripples of gray hair crossed her forehead at an unconvincing slant, but there was an air of elation about her that roused clamorous curiosity in her family. When she took her place at the head of the long table, her usual sunniness was multiplied into radiance. The boarders smiled back at her sympathetically as they shook out their napkins. Most of them had been with her four and five years, and none less than two, except a nice, fresh-looking boy who sat by Mr. Berry, and nearly strangled himself trying not to laugh too much.

"Now, Mrs. Williams," began Mr. Berry, "you know you're going to tell us by dessert, anyway. Why not let us have it with the soup and enjoy it with you?"

"What do you want me to tell you?" demanded Mrs. Williams, with pleasant, elderly dimples coming and going around her mouth.

"Why you shot off this noon with two white waistbands hanging down your back," was the prompt answer. "Excuse me if they're things I ought not to mention. You know I never had any sisters to put me on."

"Some one has been telling on me," protested Mrs. Williams. "Pauline, I didn't suppose you'd make fun of your old mother the minute her back was turned."

"Well, she couldn't before it was turned, in this case," interposed Edy, and there was a general giggle, in which Mrs. Williams led. Mr. Berry went back to the attack.

"If you don't tell me yourself, you know I'll get it out of Miss Edy afterwards," he said. "She can't keep anything."

"Well, I certainly couldn't keep a boarding house with you in it," said Edy promptly, to the vast delight of the others.

"There's where she got you, Frank," some one applauded.

"Well, I guess she's safe enough this time," commented Mrs. Williams. "She don't know any more than you do, and she isn't going to yet a while."

"Oh, it isn't anything," declared Pauline. "Mamma acted just this way when some one promised us a Persian kitten. My! We thought it was going to be a horse and carriage, and were fighting about who should drive, when the miserable thing came in a paper box. We never forgave it."

"Probably this time it's a pug dog," said Edy.

"You'll see," returned their mother with a shake of her head.

It was several weeks before they did see. Mrs. Williams made many trips to Uncle Daniel, and was increasingly mysterious, but refused to explain.

"That pug dog is too young to leave its mother yet," was all she would say. "You'll have it in due time—if it lives."

Late in November, she threw the whole household into excitement by going away for a couple of days.

"Your Uncle Daniel's with me, and you don't need to worry," she announced. "Pauline, you can run the house as well as I can."

"Going to bring back that pug dog, mamma?" Edy demanded.

"P'raps," she admitted, breaking into a broad smile.

The girls worked hard the next two days, realizing with a new acuteness how much their mother did.

"It's a shame," Pauline concluded, coming up from the kitchen toward dinner time the second night, and throwing herself down on a lounge. "She ought not to have to slave so. It's not fair."

"Oh, if we didn't have to keep boarders, wouldn't it be blissful?" sighed Edy.

"Think of having those big, comfortable rooms to ourselves."

"And a little bit of a dinner table," added Pauline.

"And no Mrs. Bartlett playing Queen of the Boarding House all over the place. Ugh! She does feel so regal."

"And no Miss Anderson to cook special dishes for all the time. I think she takes tea at breakfast just because nobody else does; and I know that's why she wants cocoa at lunch. There is boiled mutton to-night, and I was dying to forget that she didn't eat it, but I knew mamma wouldn't like it. She always says, 'Oh, well, she don't have so much to interest her. I guess we can give her a bit of steak.' Isn't that mamma all over?"

"We'd be richer if it wasn't," said Edy despondently. "There comes Mr. Bridges now; I can tell by the way he puts his key in. He's going to clear his throat, put his hat on the second right-hand hook while he looks at himself in the hat-rack mirror and gives his hair two little pats with his left hand; then he's

going to march upstairs humming 'The Holy City.' Oh, dear! He's been doing that in our front hall every night for five years. Why can't we live by ourselves?"

"Children!" called a voice from the basement stairs. Some one was heard mounting heavily.

"There she is," they cried, jumping up. Mrs. Williams emerged from the semi-darkness, tired, travel-marked, the gray ripples of her front hair at an angle that defied possibility; but unmistakably triumphant.

"Where's the pug dog?" demanded Edy.

"Come up to my room. I've brought him," she answered in a half whisper.

The boarders were all assembled when the three came down again. The girls looked flushed and excited, and Mrs. Williams's smile was like a burst of sunlight. They greeted her noisily, with sincere warmth. All through dinner they "kept it up," as she would have said, and there was a general air of peace and satisfaction when the men pushed back their chairs

a little and took out their cigars. Miss Anderson generally left with marked haste at this point, but to-night even she was warmed into sociability, and pretended not to notice the blue clouds of varying fragrance that began to form in level drifts below the droplight.

"Dear me, Miss Edy's got on the light blue waist," Mr. Berry commented, looking across at her approvingly. "I hope you don't all want the parlor to-night, for I always propose to her when she wears that blue waist." The nice boy beside him laughed convulsively, and blushed because he couldn't stop. Edy was quite unmoved.

"Pity it's most worn out," she said, with lazy sarcasm. Mrs. Bartlett entered in with somewhat lumbering sprightliness.

"The last time you wear it, you will have to accept him," she smiled.

"Oh, he'd never forgive me," said Edy. "It would be a mean trick."

"It would that," agreed Mr. Berry gravely. The boy's explosion was covered in a general laugh this time, to his deep gratitude.

"Well, he won't have so many more chances," announced Mrs. Williams. Something in her voice made them all turn to her. She rose and leaned two plump hands on the table, smiling down on them.

"Ladies and gentlemen," she began, "in the years we've been together, you've been very nice to me, and I've tried to be nice to you. I don't say things have been perfect; I know Minnie's coffee is uncertain and sometimes not what it should be, and I haven't forgotten that Mr. Bridges's closet door won't shut, though I can't seem to remember to get it fixed. However, I've tried to make you pretty comfortable on the whole, and I hope you'll be sorry when I tell you that this isn't a boarding house any longer. It will stay open till you all get comfortably fixed somewheres else, but after that it's my private home, to which you're all welcome whenever you're a mind to come."

There was a confused burst of wonder and dismay as she sat down, and she was overwhelmed with excited questions. The explanation was very simple. It seemed there was

newly discovered a good supply of oil on the old farm in Pennsylvania, and the people who had been trying to buy it from her at a nominal sum, without arousing her suspicions, had been obliged to pay a fair price for their bargain. She had been down for a final survey of the property, and the papers were now drawn up and signed. It was not wealth that had come to them, but a pleasant degree of comfort. They could have their home to themselves, and if they kept to a certain frugality, there would be better clothes and more theaters as a reward. Pauline was already lost in an absorbing dream of pink chiffon and yellow lace, while Edy was mentally fitting up Mr. Bridges's big, sunny room to fit her own ideas. The boarders were congratulatory, but plainly dismayed.

"Fate has been mighty nice to you, but it has played a dirty trick on us," Mr. Berry summed it up. "Miss Edy, I'll let you off tonight. I'm not up to it. Anybody that wants can have the parlor."

The next few days were very exciting. Dinner, which was always a jovial meal, be-

came positively hilarious as the different members reported each night their experiences in hunting for quarters. Mrs. Bartlett was the first to go, then Mr. Bridges and the nice boy who sat beside Mr. Berry. Gradually quiet descended on the house.

The first week of their freedom went in readjusting the house, the second in contemplating the change with smiles of satisfaction. The third Monday morning Edy wandered rather aimlessly into Pauline's room and stood staring into the sleety rain that was beating down outside.

"Isn't it good to dawdle around Monday morning?" she said.

"Isn't it?" echoed Pauline, throwing down the paper; yet there was a lack of conviction in both voices.

"We really are going to have lots of time now," Edy went on presently. "We ought to plan something regular to do. I think one's a little—restless if one doesn't."

"Well, of course we'll sew some," said Pauline without enthusiasm.

"We might take up some study."

"But what's the good? We always did hate studying. My! Wasn't I glad when we had to leave school." Edy sighed and gave in.

"I know," she said. "I don't really want to."

"Children," said Mrs. Williams from the doorway, "Lida has a headache, and I told her to go and lie down. Who will set the table for lunch?"

"Oh, I will," exclaimed both the girls at once.

The storm lasted all the afternoon, and was still beating against the windows when they sat down to dinner. Mrs. Williams eyed the two with some dissatisfaction.

"Seems as though you might change your waists for dinner, girls," she commented. "Edy, I don't believe you've even done your hair."

"Well, it doesn't feel worth while, somehow, when there's just us," she admitted, and they all fell into silence. Mrs. Williams

finally came out of her thoughts with a long sigh.

"It does seem mortal quiet," she remarked. "My conscience, don't a roast of beef last nowadays! I don't believe we'll ever get this ate up."

"We might ask some people in to help," Edy suggested listlessly.

"Why, let's," exclaimed Pauline. "Ask some people to dinner, I mean. Why can't we, mamma?" They had all brightened immensely.

"I don't see why not," Mrs. Williams said. "We can have Frank Berry in—and Mr. Bridges? All right. To-morrow's ironing; say Wednesday, then. Suppose you write them notes, Edy."

"And I'll put on my storm things and mail them," agreed Pauline enthusiastically.

The ex-boarders accepted joyfully. Word was sent to the dressmaker to hurry on the three new gowns that were well under way, and Mrs. Williams bustled happily about the kitchen preparing all her famous

specialties with hospitable recklessness. There were flowers in the drawing-room that night, and gowns that trailed, and Mrs. Williams's gray ripples had been changed for a beautiful pompadour that matched the silvery gray of her dress even better than that of her back hair. Yet when the two guests arrived in the splendor of evening clothes, the brightness seemed suddenly to die out, and an unlooked for constraint fell on them all. The affair which had seemed so simple and jolly in prospect, all at once became complicated and difficult. To be sitting in a wide circle making conversation with Mr. Bridges and Frank Berry was an impossible situation. Edy writhed under it, and grew cross and short, while Pauline was gay with a visible effort, and the two guests had come to saying "do you not" and "I beg pardon" in the torturing stiffness of the occasion, when Mrs. Williams saved the party and brought them all to spontaneous laughter by jumping up with a cry of:

"Land! I told Minnie I'd make the gravy, and I clean forgot!"

It was all right after that. Mrs. Williams hurried off, turning back her skirt as she went, and the rest, relaxing from their formality, moved about the room laughing and disputing and teazing, as they had always done. When Mrs. Williams came back and summoned them to the dining room there was a touch of flour on her cheek, and the new pompadour had a slight list to port, but the sunny friendliness of her smile became her better than any outer precision could have done. And when she said, "Boys, it's good to see you," and they caught the fragrance of a perfect turkey floating up the dumb-waiter, they could only express their joy in her by pulling out her chair and clamoring to sit next to her.

"Isn't she just bully?" Mr. Berry sighed, dropping down beside Edy.

"And isn't it good to be back?" echoed Mr. Bridges from the other side.

The dinner was a brilliant success. When she chained up the front door, four hilarious hours later, Mrs. Williams looked unwontedly thoughtful.

"Poor boys—it does seem a kind of a shame," she said a little vaguely.

Every year since their home had been turned into a boarding house, the girls had mourned for Christmas to themselves. Of all the things they had had to give up, this had seemed the hardest. And when Mrs. Williams brought the good news that November evening, their first thought had been that at last they should have a home Christmas. A dozen plans for celebration had flashed through their minds. They had plotted surprises for their mother, and she had taken each apart in turn and confided an exciting secret that was to be guarded from the other. And holly was to shine from every bracket and chandelier.

They discussed it daily. Yet, as the day drew near, the glory began to fade from the prospect. Three was such a very small number for a Christmas celebration! In the old days of prosperity, when the boys had been home, and the older sister, there had always been spontaneous noise enough to make any holiday a merry one. But now, though they

would not have confessed it, each began a little to dread the quiet Christmas to themselves that they had dreamed of so long. Mrs. Williams struck from her list, one by one, the different items of the holiday feast she had planned with such delight.

"What's the good? We'd never eat them up in this world," she said; and a dismal silence fell upon them. The news that Miss Anderson was in the parlor came like a pleasant event. Mrs. Williams went down radiating cordiality.

When she came back, half an hour later, her face was a pathetic mixture of doubt, dismay, and amusement.

"I declare, girls, I don't know what you'll do to me," she began. They looked up anxiously, and she plunged ahead. "The poor little lady did seem so sort of forlorn, and she's tried three places since she's been here, and she hadn't anybody to spend Christmas with. And before I knew it, I asked her to Christmas dinner. Yes, I did!" And she looked appealingly from one stern young judge to the other.

"It wasn't fair to you girls, and I'm sure I didn't mean to; it just came out somehow before I knew it."

"Well," said Edy slowly, "I don't know that I really—mind." The other two were visibly relieved.

"Well, I don't," said Pauline briskly. "And see here, mamma, since we won't be alone anyway, why not ask Mrs. Bartlett, too? I met her yesterday, and she hates it where she is. And she's real sweet and nice, always." They both looked rather eagerly at Edy.

"All right," she said cheerfully. "I don't mind her. And see here—we'll have the whole day to be by ourselves—why not have some of the others, too? I'll tell you—let's ask them all! Let's give a Christmas dinner party!"

"Oh, jolly!" exclaimed Pauline. Mrs. Williams's face was beaming as it had not beamed for weeks.

"Then there'll be some sense getting up a good dinner," she said. "I declare, I did just hate to order an eight-pound turkey. I

haven't bought less than a sixteen pounder in twenty years. Now, girls, you mustn't talk if you're going to stay here. I've got to make out my list."

Christmas night all the leaves were back in the table, for not one of the accustomed faces was missing. Mrs. Bartlett was regal in satin and lace, and praised and admired every one into a glow of good feeling. Miss Anderson was almost noisy, and when Lida brought her her little special dish of gravy without giblets, she was so touched that she nearly wept. Mr. Berry kept the nice boy beside him at the point of strangulation from laughter, and all ate with a keenness of appreciation that told how they had been faring during these homeless weeks.

"I declare, it's worth while having a dinner for you people," Mrs. Williams exclaimed, as a tiny, fading mound of her homemade ice cream was borne away. "It don't seem worth while getting up good things for us three alone."

"Well, any time you want us—" sug-

gested Mr. Bridges. They all paused at that. Mr. Berry put down his coffee cup and looked at her eagerly.

"Oh, Mrs. Williams, take us back!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, Mrs. Williams!" echoed Miss Anderson and Mrs. Bartlett. They all joined in, stretching out their hands to her, laughing but excited:

"Take us back!"

"But, land sakes, where'd I put you?" she protested. "We're using the rooms you——"

"Mrs. Williams," said Mr. Berry solemnly, "I will take the littlest, coldest, meanest north hall bedroom you can scrape up, if you'll just let me come!"

"And I'll go on the top floor with thankfulness," added Mr. Bridges.

"We'll take anything, *anything,*" pleaded Miss Anderson and Mrs. Bartlett. "Just let us come." Mrs. Williams looked at Pauline, and then they both turned shining eyes to Edy.

"We don't really need that sewing room at the back," she said, looking away.

"Nor the spare room, either," added Pauline joyfully. "And we can keep another girl."

"Oh, Mrs. Williams!" they all chorused again. She rested her chin on her clasped hands and dimpled down on them.

"Well, if you can find rooms to suit you, I guess I'll have to let you come," she said.

"Hooray!" shouted the nice boy before he could stop; and then they were all crowding around her, shaking her hands, radiant with satisfaction. Mr. Berry turned to Edy.

"If ever there was a saint on earth!" he exclaimed. "I mean your mother, not you. Jiminy, but it will be good to be back. I'm so grateful, I want to do something for her—make a sacrifice. Is the light blue waist quite worn out?"

"Quite," said Edy. Then their eyes met, and an irrepressible laugh escaped her. "I've got another," she added.

V

Constance Dorothea

THERE really was not anything else to do, after all Aunt Suzanna's kindness—taking us in after the fire and giving Alice such beautiful care while she was so miserable.

"Suzanna isn't the worst possible name; and maybe it will come into fashion by the time baby is grown up," said Alice, who is naturally optimistic. I had my doubts of that, but there was really no help for it—the dear lady evidently longed for a namesake, and it was the only return we could make her. So we went the whole—I mean, we gave the baby the full Suzanna McMoogle, since we were in for it, and hoped the poor little soul would forgive us later.

When the next baby came, we did not happen to have any girl names handy, having been discussing such titles as Ralph and Donald

and Philip, so the kiddie was simply "baby" for a few weeks. Then, when we were comfortably debating over Dorothea and Constance and Helen, we were taken aside and privately informed that Alice's grandmother was horribly hurt that we were not naming it after her. Now we loved Grandmother Perkins devotedly, but someway it had not occurred to us that anyone could expect anything to be named Luella. We wrestled long with the subject, but Alice's heart was tender, and Luella finally won out. And I will admit that the old lady's joy was touching.

We had plenty of feminine names ready when the third appeared, but Alice, poor girl, was so ill for a week or two that we did not give the matter a thought; though I admit an awful sinking came over me when my Aunt Effie summoned me by telephone.

"We won't! That's settled," I said between my teeth as I rang at her imposing front door.

Aunt Effie came straight to the point.

"See here," she began, settling herself

with a brisk rustle of silk, "what are you going to name that new child?"

"Dorothea," said I. She paid no earthly attention either to the assertion or to my tone.

"I don't like it," she went on, "the way you take all your names from Alice's side of the family. Your own side has some claims, I should think. Now, I haven't any children, but I can't take much interest in a Suzanna or a Luella. And I should like to take an interest in one of your children." She paused impressively. "Give her my name, and I will see that she doesn't lack for advantages," she concluded. "School, college, society—everything I would do for a daughter of my own. And there is some sense in a pretty little name like Effie. Go home and talk it over with Alice."

Well, of course, there was no real question as to our duty, after we had relieved our feelings by vowing nothing should persuade us. We were poor, and we could not deny the child the prospect of such advantages.

"We can name the next Eleanor,"

Alice suggested, trying bravely to be cheerful about it.

"There won't be any next," I said firmly.

Nineteen months later the doctor made the somewhat trite announcement: "A splendid little girl." Alice looked feebly up at me as I bent over her.

"Go and get a clergyman," she murmured. I was horribly frightened.

"Why, you're all right, dear! You're coming through splendidly!" I stammered. She gave her head a weak little shake.

"No—I mean, to name the baby—quick," she murmured. My circulation started up again, and I departed light-heartedly in search of the Reverend Dr. Hoyt. And that child was formally christened Constance Dorothea before she had her first square meal. We would have given her Helen and Rose and Eleanor, too, if we had had the courage of our desires.

It seemed almost too good to be true —not to have to apologize and explain when

we were asked the new baby's name. We had always congratulated ourselves on not boring others with the subject of our children, but I now began to have a small suspicion as to the true cause of our restraint. There is no denying that we dragged in Constance Dorothea at every opening, without a scruple. And she proved as pretty as her name when her features had set in. She was a real show child in every respect, bless her.

It was when she was about a year old that Alice came in one day with a piece of family news.

"Cousin Hermione is coming East," she announced. "She is going to spend the winter with Aunt Suzanna." I had heard of Cousin Hermione before, but the name struck ominously on my ears.

"Thank goodness, Constance Dorothea has got her name nailed on!" I exclaimed. Alice laughed.

"Oh, I should not have consented to Hermione for any reason!" she asserted.

"Rather not!" I agreed; but still I

felt a vague uneasiness. The next day I bought the baby a silver porringer and had her full name, Constance Dorothea, engraved on it at great expense. It seemed to make things more assured.

Cousin Hermione was a little dried-up person, very prim and reserved, her shabbiness brushed and mended into a dim gentility, who talked with the corners of her mouth held tightly together and shook hands distantly with the babies when introduced. She seemed to consider conversation as an instrument for preventing familiarity, and I would gladly have followed the frank retreat of my three daughters if the laws of hospitality and Alice's firm eye had not held me. Then Constance Dorothea woke up audibly and was brought in as soon as she could be whisked into a clean dress. She was not a shy young person and she stared earnestly at her new relative, then broke into an enthusiastic smile and called a greeting in her own language, for which the nearest translation would be:

"Hello, old girl! Bully for you!" It

seemed to me that the tight corners of Cousin Hermione's lips showed a faint quiver.

"She has never walked alone yet, but she can stand," said Alice, putting the baby down on her two little square moccasins. Cousin Hermione, who sat a few feet away, almost held out her hand.

"A healthy-looking child," she said, her eyes fixed on the beaming face. How or why it happened no man might tell, but at that moment Constance Dorothea straightened her little back, stood wavering an instant, then lurched bravely across the intervening space, six full steps all alone, and would have gone down with a thud at Cousin Hermione's feet if she had not caught the little starfish hands in a breathless rescue. Alice was too excited over the event to notice anything else, but I took a short-sighted satisfaction in our visitor's imperfectly concealed pleasure. I dare say it is flattering to have a baby take her first steps for you; anyway, Cousin Hermione, stiffly and nervously, drew Constance Dorothea into her lap, and she made an infernally long call. I don't

suppose anyone had ever before sucked her finger or jerked her watch chain or even butted her in the chest.

When she did get up to go, she stood looking wistfully at Fatness on the floor.

"She has a look of my mother, your great-aunt Hermione, Alice," she said. "It is something about the brow. She was a remarkable woman. Her mother was named Hermione, too—that was your great-grandmother. It has always been one of our family names."

"Yes, so it has," Alice assented.

"No, you don't!" I muttered, quite inaudibly—though Alice insisted afterwards that it could have been heard a block.

"It has begun," I told her, when the front door had closed.

"Oh, nonsense! Baby is christened," returned Alice.

Cousin Hermione came in nearly every day after that, but we never got any closer to her. We could not very well chew at her knuckles nor pull her hair, and that seemed to be the only way to pass her barriers. She and

Constance Dorothea developed an intimacy that delighted Alice, who only laughed at my warnings. I called the baby "Hermione" once, just to put that young person on her guard, but she, too, chuckled in my face. I was the prophet without honor.

The resemblance to great-aunt Hermione seemed to increase daily about the brow of Constance Dorothea. Evidently the one great feeling in the life of this little wisp of humanity had been for her mother, and there was a growing wistfulness in her references to the likeness. It was a Sunday afternoon when she made her first timid attack.

"All your children seem to have family names, Alice," she ventured. "I—I approve of that. It seems fitting to commemorate the —the most valued members of a family." Alice in her blind security assented to the general proposition. "Do you never wish you had—done the same—with this little one?" Cousin Hermione went on, flushing faintly. "I had so hoped that somewhere—my mother's name—Hermione——"

"Yes, of course," said Alice sympathetically; "but baby has been christened, you know. Dr. Hoyt came up when—when she was very little. So, of course, it could not be changed—no matter how much we wanted to."

"Oh, of course!" said Cousin Hermione, and the subject was apparently closed. Only I knew better.

After that, when she thought that no one was within earshot, she used to call the baby Hermione. I warned Alice she ought to make a bold stand and declare her mind on the subject, but she refused to see any danger.

"I hate to hurt her feelings unnecessarily," she explained.

It was several weeks later that Cousin Hermione came in with an air of repressed excitement about her.

"I have met your Dr. Hoyt," she announced, a tremor in her precise tones. "We stayed after service this morning and—and I was introduced. He says that the Church does not oppose a change of name, if the reason seems a good one."

"You refer to the marriage service?" I asked, hoping to divert her.

"No; it was in reference to christening children," she explained. "I spoke to him about——"

It was this moment that Luella, thoughtful little soul, selected for her historic tumble down the front stairs. In the commotion that followed we forgot all about Cousin Hermione, and when it was settled that Luella was only pretty well bumped, she took herself off. I saw the stiff little figure go down the walk, never dreaming that it was for the last time. When the report of a heavy cold explained her non-appearance a few days later, Alice was only relieved that the hurting of her feelings was put off.

"Of course, I shall be firm when it comes to the issue," she assured me.

"I don't know—I'm afraid she will work us yet," I answered worriedly.

Cousin Hermione's cold was suddenly pronounced pneumonia. Next thing we knew, she was very low, and wanted earnestly to speak with us.

"It's coming!" I warned Alice as we hurried over to Aunt Suzanna's. "She is going to make it a last request. If you had been frank in the first place!"

"Don't!" begged Alice. "I—I don't believe it is about the name."

"You know it is!" I returned.

We rang the bell in miserable dejection. It is not pleasant to refuse last requests. After a long delay, an agitated maid opened the door. Cousin Hermione had died fifteen minutes before.

When we went away, later, we were ashamed to look at each other, though Alice permitted herself a sigh of relief as she kissed the sleeping Constance Dorothea in her crib.

"I don't know—I don't feel altogether easy yet," I muttered, and was reproved for levity. Save in his own country!

A few days later we were summoned to Aunt Suzanna's. The poor little woman had left a will, and we went tolerantly ready to receive a coral brooch or a tree-calf copy of Emerson's "Essays." Alice was sure there

would be some memento for Constance Dorothea.

There was. We might have known it. My premonitions had not been for nothing. Ten thousand dollars in stocks and bonds—her treasured all—to go to Constance Dorothea, on one condition: that her name be changed "to that of my beloved mother, Hermione Small." There it was, ten thousand dollars; and we an unprosperous young couple with four girls.

"We won't, we won't!" we said to each other in pale dismay on the way home. But we had not said it before the lawyer, and we both knew it.

We went dismally to the nursery, where the baby beamed at us over her empty porringer. I picked it up and read the name expensively engraved on the side.

"'To the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome,'" I murmured. Then I held it up to Constance Dorothea. "Wouldn't you rather be called that than have ten thousand dollars?"

Alice held out a silver chain-purse, unusually full. "Choose, baby: which will you have?" The decision did not take Constance Dorothea two seconds; she lunged at the purse with both hands. Alice relinquished it with a long sigh.

"That settles you, Hermione Small," she said.

VI

The Lady from California

"MRS. NICHOLSON is from California," Mrs. Burke added as a congratulatory supplement to the general introduction. The newcomer slipped into her seat with eyes modestly lowered, as though disclaiming any special glory that the fact might contain.

"California—that is where I want to go," said Mrs. Whitehouse, a mature and awkward bride with a very bad cold in her head. Mr. Turnbull, across the table, lifted a square face of an elderly red from a swift absorption of soup.

"I was there once," he announced, with a relieved push of his empty soup plate from him. "Nice place—nice, kind people. Only they will serve salad before the meat. Wretched custom—couldn't find out why they did it. No one wants roast after salad."

The Californian, a thin, worn-looking woman with a sensitive mouth and the forehead of an idealist, looked up anxiously.

"Why, I never did in my house," she protested, "and none of my family did. You might find it now and then——"

"They all do it," Mr. Turnbull persisted. "I know—there six weeks and was asked out all the time. Invariable custom in California—salad before meat. Wretched idea. Why do you suppose they like it?"

A faint flush had replaced the pallid, flat pink of premature withering in Mrs. Nicholson's limp cheeks.

"I have kept house there over twenty years, and my mother before me, and I am sure—" she was beginning in a distressed voice when Mrs. Burke came to the rescue.

"Well, of course, Mrs. Nicholson, the two years you have been away may have made changes. Don't you find yourself impatient to go back, sometimes?"

"Oh, so impatient!" Mrs. Nicholson's eyes softened to longing.

"It's four years since I was there," announced Mr. Turnbull uncompromisingly.

"Do you really think California fruit is as good as ours—except just in appearance?" Mrs. Whitehouse asked deprecatingly, looking up from a low-toned conversation with her solemn husband. The anxious line came back into Mrs. Nicholson's forehead.

"But you get it a week old and picked green," she explained conscientiously. "If you could have it right off the trees, as we do in my garden——"

"Well, I had the best in the market there and I thought it pretty poor stuff," put in Mr. Turnbull. "Get better peaches out of Delaware than California ever grew. Nice people there, nice place; but they don't know what's what when it comes to flavor."

"Well, seasons vary," said Mrs. Burke pacifically. "I suppose your flowers just beat everything."

"Oh, tell us about them," said the bride, with a sigh of appreciation that ended in a sneeze. The handkerchief she clutched from

the front of her blouse brought with it a burst of pink baby ribbon, which was thrust back with embarrassed haste.

Mrs. Nicholson turned to her gratefully, her eyes alight with the frail fire of the enthusiast.

"Oh, if you could see my garden in the spring!" Her evident shyness was forgotten: heliotrope and oleanders and Banksia roses bloomed through her eager talk, trellises of jasmine vied with scarlet heaps of pomegranate and odd, fragrant names new to their ears. Even Mr. Turnbull, swallowing his roast beef as though some one held a stop watch on his performance, forebore to comment.

"My! I'd like to see it all," said Mrs. Burke comfortably. A flower garden would have roused about as much sentiment in her as a tour through a department store did, but she had a mild energy for "sights" of any sort. "Though I suppose it's you native Californians that get the most out of it," she added.

The happy excitement died out of Mrs. Nicholson's eyes and they fell uneasily.

"I—I suppose so," she said.

"Being born in a place does seem to count curiously with people," Mrs. Burke went on. "I suppose it's like your own child; an adopted one can't be just the same to you, no matter how fond you are of it."

Mrs. Nicholson seemed absorbed in her salad, and the talk drifted in other directions. Her face was still troubled when she went to her own room a little later.

"I suppose I ought to have told!" she murmured unhappily.

"The lady from California seems homesick," Mrs. Whitehouse said with vacuous kindliness when Mrs. Nicholson had gone. The others had lingered in the dining room.

Mr. Turnbull took out his cigar with an energetic jerk.

"Californians always are," he said positively. "Burst into tears at the thought of home. But they stay on here in New York year after year, if you'll notice." And he jammed the cigar back as though to repress further comment.

"Well, Mrs. Nicholson can't help it," put in Mrs. Burke, smoothing her silken lap preparatory to a comfortable crossing of her knees. "It's her daughter. Cornelia is one of those big, bossy girls that always seem to have little, meek mothers, and she's been dragging that poor lady about the continent for most two years. Mrs. Nicholson can't leave the girl to go about alone—and Cornelia hasn't any use for California."

"H'm! I'd like to see her. Must be a natural curiosity," muttered Mr. Turnbull. "Hope she's coming here."

"Dearie!" said Mr. Whitehouse with a warning glance, and Mrs. Whitehouse nervously pushed back a pink streamer between the buttons of her blouse. Then they went off together, and presently Mr. Turnbull was left alone with his landlady. He looked up abruptly after a short silence.

"She's a sick woman," he said.

"Oh, it's just a bad cold," objected Mrs. Burke. "Brides always get cold, somehow."

"Not Mrs. Whitehouse—lady from California." Mrs. Burke rose with a sigh.

"She's homesick, that's all that ails her. Between you and me, Mr. Turnbull, I'd like to do something to that big daughter of hers. The poor lady needs her home."

"Nice place, California," Mr. Turnbull admitted thoughtfully; "nice, kind people —only you do get tired of their lies!"

The next evening Mrs. Nicholson came to dinner with distress clearly written on her face, an open letter held mechanically in her left hand. She greeted the others absent-mindedly and took up her soup spoon, then laid it down with a small sigh.

"I guess you find this September heat pretty trying," said Mrs. Burke kindly. "You Californians aren't used to it."

"Don't you think it is the humidity rather than the heat that is so exhausting?" ventured Mrs. Whitehouse.

Mrs. Nicholson lifted vaguely startled eyes, then collected herself with another sigh.

"Oh, I do not mind the weather," she

said. "It is just—I had a letter from my daughter, and she thinks we had better spend the winter in New York. She wishes me to hunt up an apartment at once. I—I had rather planned to go home this fall."

Mr. Turnbull, who had been swallowing fragments of bread as fast as he could jerk them from the parent slice, glanced up at her from under a lowered forehead as he dusted away the crumbs.

"Much better stay here; you'll be vastly more comfortable," he began. "Houses are all freezing cold out there. San Francisco has the worst climate in the world, anyway. Cold gray fog every morning, howling wind every afternoon. Most overrated climate on earth."

"Oh, but that is only at one time in the year," Mrs. Nicholson explained eagerly. "If you could see it in February, or just after the first rains! And where I live, across the bay, it is warmer. You have no idea how much I sit out in my garden."

Mr. Turnbull shook his head.

"Fog and wind—have 'em all the time. I know. I was there. And no provision for keeping decently warm. Here you'll have some good, honest snow, but at least you'll be dry and warm in the house. Much better stay." Mrs. Nicholson was evidently too depressed to make a good fight.

"There is so much gardening to do in the fall," she said helplessly. "Spring will be too late."

"Well, now, perhaps you can persuade your daughter," comforted Mrs. Burke. "When do you expect her?" Mrs. Nicholson glanced at the letter.

"The wedding is next week; she is staying to be bridesmaid for a friend. I suppose she will come up the day after. She—she seems to have quite set her heart on an apartment here."

"I should think snow and ice would be hard on a person born in a tropical climate," put in Mrs. Whitehouse, diving into her blouse for her handkerchief; the burst of baby ribbon that followed to-night was pale blue.

Mrs. Nicholson's eyes fell uncomfortably. Her mouth opened, hesitated, closed again.

"H'm! Tropical climate!" muttered Mr. Turnbull. "Wait till you've worn your winter flannels there in August. Tropical!" But the lady from California was too far down to protest.

The hunted expression of the apartment hunter was added to the dejection of Mrs. Nicholson's sensitive face during the next few days. Her hands looked thin and sick and her frail shoulders seemed daily to droop closer together. Mr. Turnbull baited her fiercely at every meal on her beloved topic and stared after her with impatient uneasiness when he had driven her from the field.

"Why don't the woman go home if she feels that way about it?" he scolded when he was alone with Mrs. Burke. "Hasn't she a grain of spunk?" She shook her head dubiously.

"You don't know Cornelia!"

The seventh night Mrs. Nicholson

came to the table more dejected than usual. Her eyelids showed a faint red line.

"House-hunting is pretty hard work," Mrs. Burke suggested kindly. "I guess you're just about discouraged, Mrs. Nicholson."

"Yes," she admitted; "yes, I am. I—I found it to-day. The very thing Cornelia wants. I could not see an objection." She sighed heavily. Mr. Turnbull jerked restlessly in his chair, then shot an impatient glance at her under his eyebrows.

"Isn't there some one who needs you out there?" he suggested. She did not brighten at the idea.

"Well, my mother is seventy-four, but she is very independent; Cornelia is just like her. She is a wonderful woman—Mrs. Matthew Martin. I wish you could have met her when you were there. If she did need me, of course—but she is not likely to. And there is no one else."

Mrs. Burke led her on to talk of her mother, which she did with a measure of enthusiasm. The picture she drew was a pleasant

one—a keen, active old lady, very much the head of her family, and humorously belligerent at any hint of failing faculties, who hoed and raked daily in her own garden, and loved a lawsuit as other grandmothers love fireside and knitting.

"Why not get her to send for you?" Mr. Turnbull asked. "God knows why anyone should prefer to live there; but if you do, won't she help you out?"

"But she is not at all likely to need me," Mrs. Nicholson persisted. Evidently the possibilities of ruse and stratagem were out of her comprehension. Mr. Turnbull opened his mouth to explain, then, meeting the clear, gentle gaze, the idealistic purity of the worn face, he closed it again with a faint grunt.

"I can show you pictures of my mother," she said when they rose from the table. "And would you care to see my garden?" There was an eager timidity in the question. "Cornelia says I bore people to death with California," she added with an apologetic smile.

"Delighted to see 'em," said Mr. Turnbull gruffly.

She brought down an armful, chiefly amateur views of a stanch old lady posed with a rake or seated in an arbor, and tangled corners of riotous garden. She explained with flushing cheeks which was the Lady Banksia rose and which the Cherokee, and how the blazing Bougainvillæa must be separated from other colors by adroit masses of green, and what did best on the north side of the house or would not thrive without the south; and Mr. Turnbull grew momentarily more restless, but stayed with short sighs and suppressed jerks, held by the unconscious pathos of her home-love.

"You see, my garden adjoins my mother's and she looks out for both while I am away," she explained; "so there is nothing that really calls me home. And I must not be selfish about it, of course. A young girl needs her good times."

"Had two years, hasn't she?" he asked, seizing the interval to edge away from the photographs, which Mrs. Nicholson was

spreading out again as though for a second inspection.

"Yes; but she does not seem to get tired of it." Tears welled up in her eyes. "I am really foolishly fond of my home," she apologized.

"Yes, of course;" Mr. Turnbull brought himself sternly back and even picked up a picture, a view of the mother's vine-covered house with Mrs. Martin seated militant on the front porch.

"You were born here?" he asked. She hesitated.

"No—no, not in that house. It was quite another house," she said nervously; the light had left her face and she began to collect the pictures. "I have taken the refusal of the apartment for two days," she added dully. "Cornelia will be here day after to-morrow." Mr. Turnbull seemed to be musing on the picture he still held.

"Corner house," he said. "What streets? I may have passed it."

She told him, with a faint return of the

glow; it seemed that the neighborhood had special beauties in the way of trees and gardens. Strangers were always driven round that way.

"You probably passed it," she said, gathering up her armful. "I wish I had a better view of the grape arbor. Do you know the California grapes?"

"I know the red ink they call California wine," he began with energy, but broke off at her look of dismayed preparation for defense. "Some of it is very good, of course," he ended weakly. "Nice place, California. People were very kind to me there."

"They are hospitable," she said gratefully. "Don't tell my daughter I bothered you with these," she added with her dim smile.

"No bother at all," mutterd Mr. Turnbull, eagerly making his escape. He paused on the steps outside to light his cigar. "Hang it, it's not my business," he protested, flinging away the match. "If she can't manage her own affairs—" He stumped defiantly down the steps; but under the next lamppost he paused and, drawing out a card, noted down a

name and address. "Not that I intend to interfere!" he asserted. At the door of his club ten minutes later he gave a resentful snort. "Californians make me tired!"

In the morning Mrs. Nicholson did not appear at breakfast, and Mrs. Burke brought news of a nervous headache.

"She's just making herself sick, poor lady," was her pitying comment.

"Well, what's she so silly for?" Mr. Turnbull spoke irascibly. "If she can't manage her own affairs——"

"Well, she is sort of helpless," Mrs. Burke conceded; "but that don't make it any easier for her."

At noon Mrs. Whitehouse reported that she had sat an hour with the invalid.

"I couldn't read to her, my cold is so bad, but it seemed to relieve her to talk of her home," she explained, patiently thrusting back an end of yellow baby ribbon into the seclusion of her blouse.

At dinner time Mrs. Nicholson was still too ill to appear.

"She seems real feverish," Mrs. Burke confided. "I don't know but what she ought to see the doctor; but she won't. She says she just can't help hoping Cornelia has changed her mind, and she's got herself all upset thinking about it. Well, the girl will be here to-morrow morning."

"I really think it would be a good thing for her to return to California," ventured Mrs. Whitehouse. "She seems to be homesick. At least I thought so," she added in apology under the sudden glare Mr. Turnbull turned on her; but he made no comment beyond a subdued noise in his throat.

Mounting the stairs after dinner, Mr. Turnbull passed a maid coming down with an untouched tray of dinner. The door of Mrs. Nicholson's room had been left ajar, and involuntarily his glance fell on a limp form, very still under a white counterpane. The eyes were closed, but the folded hands rested on a photograph.

"Oh, good Lord!" he muttered savagely to the walls of his own room. A half

sheet of paper was lying on the table, and, bending over it, he began to write in pencil, with many pauses and erasures. Presently he thrust the scribbled slip into his pocket and went out.

Mrs. Nicholson appeared at breakfast, white and wan. She had a grateful smile for Mr. Turnbull, remembering the happy hour over the photographs, but he snubbed her unmercifully.

"You wouldn't get days like this in California," he said, with a nod to the open window. "We'll have three months of it now. Better be glad you're to stay." She looked at him piteously.

"Our fall is beautiful too," she pleaded. "Oh, I wish you could see—" She stopped as the unmistakable envelope of a telegram was laid beside her plate. Her frown of anxiety as she broke it open slowly gave way to wonder, then to a dawning radiance that spread and deepened till for the moment she looked like a tremulous girl. She breathed a soft "Oh!" of utter relief.

"Good news?" suggested Mrs. Burke. She lifted shining eyes.

"It is from my mother!" Her lips quivered as she read it to them: "Am perfectly well, but need company. You have been gone long enough. Come home at once."

"Well, I declare!" said Mrs. Burke in hearty congratulation.

"Shall you go?" inquired Mr. Turnbull.

"Go?" Tears gushed into her eyes. With a broken apology, half laugh, half sob, she rose and hurried from the room. Mrs. Burke meditated during the rest of the meal, sending an occasional speculative glance at Mr. Turnbull. He avoided her eyes, but, nevertheless, lingered till they were alone.

"Well?" said Mrs. Burke.

"Well?" was the defiant answer.

"What do you suppose made old Mrs. Martin wire like that?"

"How should I know?"

"Well, I found this in the hall this morning. I don't know as I had any right to

read it." She held out a crumpled half sheet of paper holding several lines of pencil scribbling, much scratched and interlined. In its final form it read:

"Excuse a meddling outsider. Mrs. Nicholson's health imperilled by homesickness. Stays to oblige daughter. Would advise a recall if possible. Oblige by considering this confidential."

Mr. Turnbull thrust it into his pocket and turned away with a scowl. "Well, I had to have some peace," he grumbled over his shoulder as he went out. She laughed.

"You're real good—I don't care how you put it! I won't tell on you."

He came back from the front door.

"If she wants to get off this afternoon, tell her I'll see to her tickets and berths," he suggested. "I want her out of the house! That girl will be here by noon, won't she? And if she needs a check cashed——"

"Oh, you are real kind!" she repeated as she went upstairs.

Late that afternoon Mr. Turnbull escorted a radiant woman, followed by a handsome, sulky girl, to the overland train.

"Though what on earth you want to go for! Could be warm and comfortable here," he protested as they stood together on the platform.

She was not listening; there was some struggle going on that clouded her brightness for the moment and made her eyes big and anxious.

"Well, what's up now?" he asked. "Want to stay, after all?"

"You have been so kind," she faltered. "About the pictures, and all you have done today. I never could have got off without you."

"Well, that's all right. Guess I've badgered you some too. You native Californians sort of rub me——"

"That is just it," she broke in tremulously. "It is not fair to take it all and not tell you"—she had to clear her voice—"I am not

a native Californian at all, Mr. Turnbull. I was born in Chicago, and we did not go there till I was nine years old. I was very weak and foolish not to confess it at once; but people won't believe that you can love a place like a native—even more than a native—though you did happen to be born somewhere else. And the place is so much to me, so dear—you don't know how hard it is always to be frank about that! But I am so ashamed of having deceived you! Will you tell Mrs. Whitehouse and the others?" And there were actual tears in her eyes.

Mr. Turnbull took her hand.

"Won't tell a blessed soul," he said severely. "Ought to be a native, if you aren't. We'll keep that a secret. Whose business is it, anyway?" She smiled gratefully.

"If it would not be too deceitful?" she said with a sigh of happy relief.

Cornelia mounted the car steps and called impatiently to her mother to follow. Mr. Turnbull stood below, hat in hand, as Mrs. Nicholson opened the window of her section.

"Good-by," he said. "Teach 'em not to serve salad before the meat."

"But they don't!" she protested earnestly as the train began to move.

"Nice, kind people—but they all do it," he called after her. There was a twinkle under his eyebrows as he turned away.

VII

Telling Kate

"ANOTHER package, Mis' Redding. Ye're after buyin' out the shops, these days!"

"Very well, Kate. Just put it in my room." Mrs. Redding spoke with mild dignity, looking up from her account book with reproving eyebrows, but a less martial spirit than Kate's would have detected the underlying weakness. The round little withered-apple face stayed serenely in the doorway.

"There's a new baby acrost the street," Kate went on. "Their girl come over and told me when I was brushin' down the steps. She ain't goin' to stay."

"But isn't that rather inconsiderate—to leave just when there is a new baby?" Mrs. Redding suggested, her eyes fixed on the end of her penholder.

"No, ma'am. I wouldn't stay where

there was childrun—not wan minut. It's three times the washin', and nothin' goin' as it should. No, ma'am."

Mrs. Redding bent over her accounts without answering, and Kate partly withdrew, then thrust her head back again.

"That steak ye sent up ain't fit to eat," she announced. "It's that tough ye'll never be able to cut it."

"I'm sorry. You will have to do what you can with it, Kate," Mrs. Redding said without looking up. "It is too late to get anything else."

"Well, ye won't be satisfied, that's all," Kate grumbled, shutting the door. Then she opened it a crack to add, "There ain't a potato in the house." Mrs. Redding sighed.

"I'll be out presently, Kate," she said, dipping her pen firmly in the ink. Nevertheless, when she had finished the accounts, she dressed for dinner with comfortable slowness, then settled down to a book before the fire without going near the kitchen. She had not lived under Kate's rule five years for nothing.

When dinner was served, the steak proved excellent, and there were potatoes to spare. She smiled at her husband across the table.

"This is the uneatable steak," she said. "Did you ever know any one broil as Kate does? And the way she keeps the silver! Think how she has managed this entire house for us, Harry, for five years. I have never had a care since we were married. What shall we do without her?" Her husband looked up hastily.

"Have you told her?"

"Indeed I haven't—don't dare! But I must, very soon. If a new one is to be broken in—" He nodded uneasily.

"I suppose so," he admitted. "Couldn't you—write her a letter?" They both laughed.

"It will be bad enough to lose her; but, oh, the scolding we'll get first!" Mrs. Redding exclaimed.

Some days later Kate walked without ceremony into the sitting room where Mrs. Redding was lying on the couch, and gazed intently at the white muslin curtains with her

little red-rimmed eyes. Then she marched out again, and presently returned with a stepladder, which she planted by the windows.

"There, now; if ye'll just take down them curtains while I redd up my kitchen, I'll wash 'em out for ye," she announced. Mrs. Redding glanced at the ladder in dismay.

"I—can't, Kate. I don't feel equal to it," she protested, laying her hands across her forehead with a hypocritical air of headache. The tip of Kate's ruddy little pug nose wrinkled slightly, but she made no comment, and soon a subdued puffing, accompanied by a creaking of wood, showed that she was mounting the steps herself. Presently she spoke from the top:

"Ye don't take exercise enough, Mis' Redding. Ye used to be as spry as a cat round the house. Ye're gettin' rale lazy."

Mrs. Redding opened her lips to speak, hesitated, then closed them again, letting her hand slip down across her eyes.

"There's other parlor curtains in this block that wouldn't be the worse for washin',"

Kate went on. "Acrost the street there now —I wouldn't be found with my curtains like them. But that's always the way when there's childrun—nothin' as it should be. They got a new girl, but her looks don't say much for her. She'll not stay long."

"But there have to be children in the world, Kate," Mrs. Redding faintly protested.

"Well, maybe!" said Kate dubiously, coming cautiously down with an armful of dusty-smelling muslin. "I'm no hand for them myself. Now are ye aqual to takin' the pins outen these whilst I get ready for 'm?"

"Oh, yes, I can do that," said her mistress meekly.

That night Mr. Redding found the sitting room clothed in fresh curtains, and his wife slightly feverish.

"I almost told Kate, Harry; and then I couldn't," she told him. "I simply hadn't the courage."

"Why not wait a week or two longer?" he weakly suggested. She shook her head.

"Oh, I can't stand it hanging over me

much longer! I'd rather face the worst and have it done with. Harry," she went on, curling her fingers into his, "you're a big, strong man, while I am only a poor, weak woman—you must do the telling."

"Yes, dear, of course," he agreed, with an empty show of heartiness. "Only—might it not be simpler just to break up housekeeping?"

"What a coward you are!" she accused him.

"It isn't cowardice to be afraid of Kate; that's just common prudence," he explained.

The following Sunday, Mr. Redding being away, Kate enlivened her mistress's solitary luncheon with the news of the neighborhood.

"That baby acrost the street, he's rale sick," she announced. "Yes, ma'am. I guess he ain't goin' to live—they had the doctor all mornin'." Mrs. Redding looked shocked.

"Oh, Kate, how dreadful!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, ma'am, it is so," Kate affirmed, with a decorous enjoyment of the calamity, and went on to offer other neighborhood items; but Mrs. Redding's thoughts kept recurring to the sick baby. When she had contrived to get rid of Kate, the idea still haunted her—how frightened they must be, how tortured if the poor little thing suffered. Finally she sent Kate over for news, and left her luncheon half eaten to wait at the window for her return. The report was not hopeful.

Sunday afternoon is not a good time to be nervous and lonely. Mrs. Redding wandered restlessly about the house, oppressed by the other woman's trouble. She could not get the thought out of her head—all the waiting and planning and suffering, the happiness and the hopes and the little clothes, all for nothing. She would have comforted herself once with the thought there would be other children; but now her knowledge went deeper, and she knew that the perfection of this first planning could never come again—the fresh wonder of it, the fear and the eagerness, the long pondering over

names, the humor of those first tiny garments. She longed with all her full heart to go across the street, but a stranger would not be needed or wanted in that busy, anxious household. She could only hover about the windows and send Kate for news. Once, trying to find distraction, she shut herself in her room and took out some fine sewing; but her hands were not steady enough. At dusk she dropped down in the shelter of the fresh white curtains, and gave herself up to waiting. There was a light in the upper window across the street, but the shades were not drawn, and she could see figures passing back and forth, or standing together in grave consultation. An hour later Kate found her still there.

"Will Misther Redding be home for dinner?" she asked.

"No; and I don't want any, Kate. Just give me some tea."

"Ye're worritin' about that child," grumbled Kate, lifting the curtain to peer across.

"I can't help it, Kate. I can't think

of anything else. They seemed so young and——"

She broke off, to lean forward. The doctor, who had been standing near the window in the lighted room opposite, started as though abruptly summoned and disappeared. At the same instant a woman hurried past, almost running. Quick shadows sped back and forth for a moment, then the room seemed to grow very still. Mrs. Redding pressed her cold hands together and murmured a broken entreaty. She had quite forgotten the old woman standing behind her. After a long pause the nurse appeared at the windows and pulled the shades down very gently. Mrs. Redding buried her face in her hands.

"Oh, poor little soul!" she sobbed.

Kate went away without a word. Half an hour later she came back with a tray that was the perfection of temptation. She was very glum and stern, and Mrs. Redding ate meekly, thankful for the comfort, and not daring to ask the trouble. When the tray was taken away she ventured a conciliating good night, but re-

ceived no reply beyond a severe sniff. Nevertheless, when she crept wearily up to bed a couple of hours later, she found the sheet turned down and the room made ready for her —an unusual attention.

"So I am forgiven," she thought, glad that the blinds were closed to shut out the house opposite. "Oh, dear! what shall I do without Kate!"

The next morning Mr. Redding went down town knowing that he must tell Kate before the day was over. Intelligence offices flaunted their signs at him from every side. He peered into one and turned away sick at heart —dullness, laziness, inefficiency seemed written on every face. When he let himself in late in the afternoon, the sweet and wholesome cleanness of his house filled him with bitterness for what might be in store. He passed out through the pleasant kitchen, redolent of good things to come, into the back yard, where Kate was taking down the last batch of scrupulously white clothes. He looked at the ruddy, seamed face, the stumpy figure and fierce little gray

wad of hair, and felt his courage sink. Kate went on taking off the clothespins as he loitered by the fence, pretending to examine a vine, and for several moments nothing was said. Then he found the little red-rimmed eyes fixed on him.

"Ye'll have to be gettin' me some more clothes-line soon, Misther Redding," she said.

"Haven't you enough?" he asked nervously, clutching at the excuse to delay the telling. Kate gathered the last armful of towels and turned to the house with her load. At the door she sent him a shrewd glance over her shoulder.

"Enough for the family as it is at prisint," she said, and there was the glimmer of a smile about her puckered mouth. Redding sprang after her.

"Kate!" he exclaimed. She turned her back on him and began to poke violently at the fire, but he laid his hands on her shoulders. "You're an old brick!" he said.

"Ah, go 'long!" said Kate. "What's a house without childrun, annyhow?"

VIII

Something

"WELL, *Ted*dy!" Mrs. Starr's intense little face was impressed, even awed, and yet at the same time triumphant. Mr. Starr glanced without excitement at the letter she was holding up across the breakfast table. His polite "Well?" betrayed the noncommittal caution of the legal mind, though there was a gleam of provisional amusement behind his glasses that changed her triumph to pleading.

"Oh, Teddy, won't you admit, just this once, that it is at least queer? You know how we were talking of Cousin Emma last night, and I hadn't even thought of her for days and weeks—and now here is a letter from her. Do you mean to say that that is mere coincidence?"

Mr. Starr appeared to deliberate. "We also talked a good deal about Mr. Roosevelt,"

he observed finally, spreading out the morning paper. "Anything from him?"

"Oh, if you are going to be funny—!" And his wife turned disappointedly to the coffee pot. The reproof evidently disturbed him, for presently he emerged from the news to ask:

"What time of day was the letter written, Lollie?" She met the advance with an eagerness that showed unquenchable hope of a convert.

"Yesterday morning, dear; the postmark says 2 P.M."

"Well, then, did her thought-wave take eight hours or so to get here, or was it the letter in the mail that suddenly wigwagged last night?"

"Now, Teddy, what is the use of being tiresome and literal?" Lollie was plaintive. "I only claim that there's *something*—I don't pretend to know how it works. It happens too often for mere coincidence to explain it." And she began to read her letter. A moment later he was interrupted by a note of triumph.

"*Now* will you be convinced!" she

cried. "What were we saying about her last night?"

He admitted, with the reserve of a truthful but circumspect witness, that they had been wishing the boy might go down to Cousin Emma for a week of country life, and so confirm his restored health. She nodded assent.

"Exactly! Now listen:

"'My Dear Laura: I have been thinking of you so much lately. I have had a feeling that something was going wrong with you or yours, and was on the point of writing to you when a letter from Aunt Miriam brought the news of the dear boy's illness. I am so thankful that he is well again. Won't you send him down to me for a week or two of country air? Tell him Flora has five new puppies, and that——'"

She broke off to crow over him. "What do you say to that, Mr. Teddy?"

"Why, I say he had better go," was the irritatingly calm answer.

She gave up the point with a sigh. "Oh, yes. I will take him down to-morrow. Will you have more coffee, dear?"

"Well, by Jove!" Mr. Starr was staring at her with astonished eyes.

"What?" she asked excitedly.

"That *is* the queerest thing!"

"Tell me, dear!" Her unsuspecting delight in seeing him, for once, roused should have touched him.

"Do you know," earnestly, "the very moment you spoke, I was about to ask you for another cup of coffee? Wasn't that strange? How do you explain it?" Her face fell.

"I think you're simply *hor*-rid," she protested, resentfully accepting the cup. "You are just a stupid materialist, blind to everything that you can't feel with your two paws. I tell you, Theodore Starr, the world is simply full of things that you will never know."

"Well, when some healthy, normal man tells me about them, I will begin to listen," he conceded.

"I don't believe the very healthy ever

know some things," she answered with unexpected mildness. "Their bodies crowd out their souls. I know things every day—things I couldn't prove to you, and yet I *know* them. If anything were wrong with you or the boy, I should know it instantly—absolutely—know it and go to you!" She was deeply in earnest, and her eyes looked so big and brown, her face so white and little, that his teasing was checked.

"Lollie, my dear, we could spare some of your soul for a little more body," he said worriedly.

The next day she took the boy down to Cousin Emma, planning happily to stay a night herself. The little farm had been a second home to her childhood, as it was now to her son. Nevertheless, at ten o'clock that night her husband, deep in a book, thought he heard the nibble of a latch-key. Before he could be sure, the door opened and she came swiftly in. Her eyes darted from him to his safe and orderly surroundings, then returned with a smile that betrayed relief.

"I came home after all," she an-

nounced; but her lightness had a touch of bravado. He put his hands on her shoulders, holding her at arm's length.

"Lollie, you were going to stay all night," he accused her.

"But the boy was perfectly happy with Cousin Emma——"

"And then you had one of your marvelous intuitions: you FELT that I was suffering and in danger," he went on sternly. "So you made them harness up at all hours——"

"It wasn't late, sweetheart." She tried to interrupt him with feminine blandishments, but he still held her off.

"And you pushed the train along with your two feet the entire way, then came home on a dead run to save me——"

"'And the dog was a-laffin','" she broke in. "If you don't want to greet me properly, you might let me take my hat off."

He greeted her properly; but—"Now, don't you see, Lollie, what nonsense it all is—these psychic messages?" he insisted. She slipped away with a laugh.

"Who said I had a psychic message? I wanted to come home, and I did, that's all. Cousin Emma understood."

"Of course she did; she is worse than you are. She has 'feelings' about the bread's rising, and the train's being late, and company coming; and sometimes her premonitions come true, but she never keeps track of the times they don't! For your own sake, Lollie, I want you to realize——"

"Teddy, I have a feeling—an intuition—that you are going to lecture for the next half hour; so I have an engagement upstairs."

She ran off, incorrigibly light-hearted and elusive; but a moment later he heard his name called in quite another voice—a quick, frightened cry. He dashed upstairs, to find his wife sitting, breathless, on the side of the bed with the charred remains of a muslin curtain at her feet.

"Teddy!" she panted. "You *know* we never light that gas—just because—of the curtain. And to leave it lit—with the window open——!"

"By Jove! Did I? It had just caught?" He was looking anxiously for stray sparks.

"The draught of opening the door blew it right in. I did feel so helpless!" She shuddered. "But it came down at the first pull: I had only to step on it."

"There ought never to have been a curtain there, anyway," he began, gathering up the remains "Either this must stay down, or I shall have that fixture taken out. That was bound to happen, sooner or— What is it?" he interrupted himself, caught by his wife's fixed gaze.

"I was just thinking," she said slowly, "that it was as well I came home!"

"Oh, come, now—that is utter nonsense! Don't you suppose I am as capable of putting out a blaze as you? Besides—" He set forth the logic of the case exhaustively, becoming almost vehement in his desire to make her see the falseness of her position; and she heard him out with a baffling air of gentle indulgence.

"I am so glad I came!" was her only comment.

Laboriously printed letters told her daily that her "loving little son" was well and hoped she was well, and for five days Mrs. Starr went to sleep in peace about him and got up in contentment.

"I am never uneasy for a moment when Cousin Emma has him," were her last words Saturday night. Six hours later Mr. Starr was awakened by a breathless voice. There was just light enough to show him two big, frightened eyes staring at him out of a white little face.

"Teddy!" Her hand closed tightly on his arm. "It woke me up. I am so frightened. It's the boy!"

"What? What has happened?" he asked bewilderedly.

"I don't know—there is something wrong. I am sick with fright! I can't stand it." She sprang up and began hurriedly to dress.

"Now, Laura!" he began, all the logi-

cal remonstrance of the indignant legal mind arrayed in his voice. She put up one hand as though to check a child's interruption.

"Find me a time table," she commanded, twisting up her hair with fingers that shook. Something in the face staring unseeingly from the mirror turned back the tide of his argument, leaving him silent. He obeyed, then, still in silence, dressed and went downstairs, returning presently with a glass of milk and some biscuits.

"There is a sort of milk train we can get in half an hour," he announced drily. "How we shall get up from the village, and how you will explain our dropping in at dawn, I am not so clear about."

She glanced at him dimly out of her dire preoccupation. "I am ready now," was all she said. He insisted on the milk, and brought the biscuits in his pocket.

The chill of a bleak March daybreak was on the deserted streets and in the early car that crashed and jolted down to the station. The one passenger car of their train appeared

unprepared for passengers, the cinders and orange peel of its last trip still strewing seats and floor. Their breath was visible in the stale, chill air. Mr. Starr, sunk in discomfort, at first maintained the silence of outraged patience; but his wife's blank unconsciousness of him and his attitude presently goaded him to more active measures.

"Look here, Lollie," he began with a forced air of reasonableness, "I want you to tell me exactly what it was—what you heard or saw or dreamed, to send you on this wild-goose chase." The face she turned to him was so pitifully haunted that he was obliged hastily to harden himself with reminders of his own annoyance.

"I don't think I can tell you," she said finally. "It was a sort of dream, and yet I was awake. There was some big, dark danger just ahead of him, and I knew, if I ran fast enough, I could save him. Then it all vanished, leaving this awful oppression." She strained her hands against her chest. "Oh, why does the train stop and stop?" she cried.

He could do nothing with her, or for her, and in spite of all his logic and his common sense, her state began presently to have an effect on him. Untoward things did happen on lonely little farms. He vehemently maintained that there was no more reason to expect disaster to-day than on any other day; yet he, too, grew nervous at the slowness of the train, and caught himself at the absurd device of trying to hurry it with braced feet. The biscuits in his pocket crumbled, forgotten. But for shame's sake, he would have spent the last half hour pacing the aisle.

At the station they found a wagon going in their direction and willing to drop them at the farm gate. The morning down here was turning out sweet and sunny; birds were calling, and a green mist lay on the willows. Mr. Starr threw off his depression, and tried to tease Laura into a lighter mood; yet even he felt a tightening in his throat when at last they jumped down before Cousin Emma's rambling old white house. The wide open windows and the peaceful smoke from the kitchen chimney

spoke reassuringly of morning order and coffee. Laura darted through the gate, then stopped short.

"Look at that!" she cried joyously.

"That" was their own small son, apparently in the best of health, high up in the branches of an apple tree just ahead of them. He turned sharply at her voice, and evidently was moved to run and meet her without the formality of first climbing down. There was a dreadful sound of slipping and clutching, and a little body came crashing toward the granite slabs below.

"I've got him!" called Mr. Starr, in answer to his wife's cry; and a moment later he was seated smartly on the granite slabs with his son on top of him.

"Why, hello, daddy!" shouted the boy, cheerfully ignoring this little interruption in his welcome.

"Don't you climb that tree again!" was the ungracious response as Mr. Starr slowly picked himself up. Mrs. Starr was on her knees by the boy, loving and kissing him

with passionate little whispers and murmurs. Then she lifted wet eyes to her husband.

"Now, dear, do you see why we came?" she asked.

"For Heaven's sake, Laura!" Mr. Starr's tried nerves gave away altogether. "You'll drive me crazy! Don't you see that you startled him and made him fall? If we had stayed sensibly home in our beds he would have climbed down as he climbed up. How can you be so foolish?"

She pressed her face into the little body she held. "I knew, I knew!" she murmured brokenly.

"Well, well!" Cousin Emma's hospitable voice preceded her down the path. "This is nice! I had a feeling that you would be down to-day, but I didn't look for you so early. Come right in and have some breakfast. Did the boy tell you what a fright he gave me last night?" she added, after their greetings were over. They stopped short in the path. "Walked in his sleep, the little tyke; something woke me just in time to find him in the

hall, headed straight for the stairs. I *was* frightened."

Mrs. Starr had flung her arm about her son; but her eyes, big and awed, were lifted to her husband's face.

"What time did it happen?" he asked defensively, drawing out his watch.

"Oh, soon after I went to bed. I hadn't been asleep long. About eleven, I should think."

He nodded at his wife. "Just as you were saying that you felt perfectly comfortable about him," he reminded her with open satisfaction. She shook her head with the patient quiet of perfect conviction.

"There's Something!" she answered.

IX

A Mother of Four

"You are fortunate to find us alone, Mrs. Merritt. With four girls, it is simply terrible—callers underfoot wherever you stir. You must know something about it, with two daughters; so you can fancy it multiplied by two. Really, sometimes I get out of all patience—I haven't a corner of my house to myself on Sundays! But I realize it is the penalty for having four lively daughters, and I have to put up with it."

Mrs. Merritt, the visitor, had a gently worried air as she glanced from the twins, thin and big-boned, reading by the fire, to pretty, affected Amélie at the tea-table, and the apathetic Enid furtively watching the front steps from the bay window. Something in her expression seemed to imply a humble wonder as

to what might constitute the elements of high popularity, since her two dear girls——

"Of course, mine have their friends," she asserted; it was an admission that perhaps the door-bell was not overworked. "I enjoy young life," she added.

"Oh, yes, in moderation!" Mrs. Baldwin laughed from the depths of the complacent prosperity that irradiated her handsome white hair and active brown eyes, her pleasant rosiness, and even her compact stoutness, suggesting strength rather than weight. "But since Enid became engaged, that means Harry all the time —there's my library gone; and with the other three filling both drawing-rooms and the reception room, I have to take to the dining room, myself! There they begin," she added, as Enid left the window and slipped out into the hall, closing the door after her. "Now we shall have no peace until Monday morning. You know how it is!"

Mrs. Merritt seemed depressed, and soon took her leave.

The twins, when they were left alone in

the drawing-room, lifted their heads and exchanged long and solemn looks; then returned to their reading in silence. When it grew too dark by the fire, they carried their books to the bay window, but drew back as they saw a pale and puny youth with a retreating chin coming up the front steps.

"The rush has begun," murmured Cora.

"Amélie can have him," Dora returned. "Let's fly."

They retreated upstairs and read peacefully until tea-time. The bell did not ring again. When they came down, Mrs. Baldwin eyed them irritably.

"Why don't you ask the Carryl boys in to Sunday tea some time? They will think you have forgotten them. And Mr. White and that nice Mr. Morton who lives with him—I am afraid you have offended them in some way. They used to be here all the time."

"They only came twice, and those were party calls," said Dora bluntly.

"My dear, you have forgotten," was

the firm answer. "They were here constantly. I shall send them a line; I don't like to have them think we have gone back on them."

"Oh, I—I wouldn't," began Cora, but was put down with decision:

"When I need your advice, Cora, I will ask for it. Amélie, dear, you look tired; I am afraid you have had too much gayety this afternoon."

"Oh, I love it! It's the breath of life to me," said Amélie rapturously. The twins again exchanged solemn looks and sat down to their tea in silence. Mrs. Baldwin attacked them peevishly at intervals; she was cross at Enid also, who had not kept Harry to supper, and preserved an indifferent silence under questioning. "When I was your age—!" was the burden of her speech.

"I must give a dance for you young people," she decided. "You need livening up."

"Oh, lovely!" exclaimed Amélie.

"We have not had one this winter—I don't know what I have been thinking about,"

Mrs. Baldwin went on with returning cheerfulness. "We won't ask more than a hundred. You must have a new frock, Amélie. Enid, how is your blue one?"

"Oh, all right," said Enid indifferently. Mrs. Baldwin turned to the twins, and found them looking frankly dismayed.

"Well, what is it now?" she exclaimed. "I am sure I try to give you as good times as any girls in town; not many mothers on my income would do one half so much. And you both sit looking as if you were going to execution!"

"We—we do appreciate it, mother," urged Cora unhappily.

"But we aren't howling successes at parties," Dora added.

"Nonsense! You have partners to spare." Mrs. Baldwin was plainly angry. "No child of mine was ever a wallflower, nor ever will be. Never let me hear you say such a thing again. You would have twice the attention if you weren't always poking off by yourselves; and as it is, you have more than most

girls. You frighten the men—they think you are proud. Show a little interest in them and see how pleased they will be!"

The twins looked dubious, and seized the first chance to escape. In their own room they confronted each other dismally.

"Of course they will ask us, in our own house; we won't have to sit and sit," said Cora with a sigh.

"But it's almost worse when they ask you for that reason," objected Dora.

"I know! I feel so sorry for them, and so apologetic. If mother would *only* let us go and teach; then we could show we were really good for something. We shouldn't have to shine at parties."

"We shouldn't have to go to them! Come on, let's do some Latin. I want to forget the hateful thing."

Cora got down the books and drew their chairs up to the student lamp. "I know I shouldn't be such a stick if I didn't have to wear low neck," she said. "I am always thinking about those awful collar-bones, and trying to

hold my shoulders so as not to make them worse."

"Oh, don't I know!" Dora had slipped on a soft red wrapper, and threw a blue one to her sister. When they were curled up in their big, cushioned chairs, they smiled appreciatively at each other.

"Isn't this nicer than any party ever invented?" they exclaimed. Dora opened her books with energy, but Cora sat musing.

"I dare say that somewhere there are parties for our kind," she said, finally. "Not with silly little chinless boys or popular men who are always trying to get away, but men who study and care about things—who go to Greece and dig ruins, for instance, or study sociology, and think more about one's mind than one's collar-bones."

Dora shook her head. "But they don't go to parties!"

"Both Mr. Morton and Mr. White do, sometimes," Cora suggested. "They aren't like the rest. I thought that tenement-house work they told us about was most interesting.

But they would call if they wanted to," she added.

The twins in wrappers, bending over their books, had a certain comeliness. There was even an austere beauty in their wide, high foreheads, their fine, straight dark hair, their serious gray eyes and sensitive mouths, pensive but not without humor and sweetness. But the twins in evening dress, their unwilling hair flower-crowned and bolstered into pompadours, their big-boned thinness contrasted with Amélie's plump curves, their elbows betraying the red disks of serious application, were quite another matter, and they knew it. The night of the dance they came downstairs with solemn, dutiful faces, and lifted submissive eyes to their mother for judgment. She was looking charmingly pretty herself, carrying her thick white hair with an air of humorous boldness, and her smiling brown eyes were younger than their gray ones.

" Very well, twinnies! Now you look something like human girls," she said gayly. " Run and have a beautiful time. Ah, Amélie,

you little fairy! They will all be on their knees to you to-night. Where is Enid?"

"Nowhere near dressed, and she won't hurry," Amélie explained. "Oh, I am so excited, I shall die! What if no one asks me to dance!"

"Silly!" Mrs. Baldwin laughed. "I am only afraid of your dancing yourself to death. Ah, Mrs. Merritt, how good of you to come with your dear girls! And Mr. Merritt—this is better than I dared hope."

The rooms filled rapidly. Enid, after one languid waltz, disappeared with Harry and was not seen again till supper. Amélie flew from partner to partner, pouring streams of vivacious talk into patient masculine ears. The twins were dutifully taken out in turn and unfailingly brought back. Both Mr. White and Mr. Morton came, serious young men who danced little, and looked on more as if the affair were a problem in sociology than an entertainment. There were plenty of men, for Mrs. Baldwin's entertainments had a reputation in the matter of supper, music, and floors.

"After you've worked through the family, you can have a ripping old time," Cora heard one youth explain to another; a moment later he stood in front of her, begging the honor of a waltz. She felt no resentment; her sympathies were all with him. She looked up with gentle seriousness.

"You needn't, you know," she said. "Dora and I don't really expect it—we understand." He looked so puzzled that she added: "I overheard you just now, about 'working through the family.'"

He grew distressfully red and stammered wildly. Cora came at once to his rescue.

"Really, it's all right. We don't like parties ourselves; only it is hard on mother to have such sticks of daughters, so we do our best. But we never mind when people don't ask us. Sometimes we almost wish they wouldn't."

The youth was trying desperately to collect himself. "What *do* you like, then?" he managed to ask.

"Oh, books, and the country, and not having to be introduced to people." She was

trying to put him at his ease. "We really do like dancing: we do it better than you'd think, for mother made us keep at it. If only we didn't have to have partners and think of things to say to them!" She held out her hand. "Thank you ever so much for asking me, but I'd truly rather not." He wrung her hand, muttered something about "later, then," and fled, still red about the ears. Cora returned to her mother.

"Well, my dear, you seemed to be having a tremendous flirtation with that youth," laughed Mrs. Baldwin. "Such a hand-clasp at parting! Don't dance too hard, child." She turned to the half-dozen parents supporting her. "These crazy girls of mine will dance themselves to death if I don't keep an eye on them," she explained. "Amélie says, 'Mother, how can I help splitting my dances, when they beg me to?' I am always relieved when the dance is over and they are safe in bed—then I know they aren't killing themselves. The men have no mercy—they never let them rest an instant."

"I don't see Miss Enid about," suggested Mr. Merritt. "I suppose she and her Harry——!"

"Oh, I suppose so!" Mrs. Baldwin shook her head resignedly. "The bad child insists on being married in the spring, but I simply cannot face the idea. What can I do to prevent it, Mrs. Merritt?"

"I am afraid you can't," smiled Mrs. Merritt. "We mothers all have to face that."

"Ah, but not so soon! It is dreadful to have one's girls taken away. I watch the others like a hawk; the instant a man looks too serious—pouf!—I whisk him away!"

Cora stood looking down, with set lips; a flush had risen in her usually pale cheeks. Dora, setting free an impatient partner, joined her and they drew aside.

"It does make me so ashamed!" said Cora impulsively.

"I think mother really makes herself believe it," said Dora, with instant understanding.

They watched Amélie flutter up to their

mother to have a bow retied, and stand radiant under the raillery, though she made a decent pretence of pouting. Her partner vanished, and Mrs. Baldwin insisted on her resting "for one minute," which ended when another partner appeared.

"Amélie is asked much more than we are, always," Cora suggested. Dora nodded at the implication.

"I know. I wonder why it never seems quite real. Perhaps because the devoted ones are such silly little men."

"Or seem to us so," Cora amended conscientiously. "Don't you wish we might creep upstairs. Oh, me, here comes a man, just hating it! Which do you suppose he will—Oh, thank you, with pleasure, Mr. Dorr!" Cora was led away, and Dora slipped into the next room, that her mother might not be vexed at her partnerless state.

Mrs. Baldwin saw to it that the twins had partners for supper, and seated them at a table with half a dozen lively spirits, where they ate in submissive silence while the talk

flowed over and about them. No one seemed to remember that they were there, yet they felt big and awkward, conspicuous with neglect, thoroughly forlorn. When they rose, the others moved off in a group, leaving them stranded. Mrs. Baldwin beckoned them to her table with her fan.

"Well, twinnies, yours was the noisiest table in the room," she laughed. "I was quite ashamed of you! When these quiet girls get going—!" she added expressively to her group. The twins flushed, standing with shamed eyes averted. In the rooms above the music had started, and the bright procession moved up the stairs with laughter and the shine of lights on white shoulders: they all seemed to belong together, to be glad of one another. "Well, run along and dance your little feet off," said Mrs. Baldwin gayly.

They hurried away, and without a word mounted by the back stairs to their own room. When their eyes met, a flash of anger kindled, grew to a blaze.

"Oh, I won't stand it, I won't!" ex-

claimed Dora, jerking the wreath of forget-me-nots out of her hair and throwing it on the dressing-table. "We have been humiliated long enough. Cora, we're twenty-four; it is time we had our own way."

Cora was breathing hard. "Dora, I will never go to another party as long as I live," she said.

"Nor I," declared Dora.

They sat down side by side on the couch to discuss ways and means. A weight seemed to be lifted off their lives. In the midst of their eager planning the door opened and Mrs. Baldwin looked in at them with a displeased frown.

"Girls, what does this mean?" she exclaimed. "Come down at once. What are you thinking of, to leave your guests and go off like this!"

The twins felt that the moment had come, and instinctively clasped hands as they rose to meet it.

"Mother," said Dora firmly, "we have done with parties forever and ever. No one

likes us nor wants to dance with us, and we can't stand it any more."

"Miss Browne still wants us to come there and teach," Cora added, her voice husky but her eyes bright. "So we can be self-supporting, if—if you don't approve. We are twenty-four now, mother, and we have to live our own lives."

They stood bravely for annihilation. Mrs. Baldwin laughed.

"You foolish twinnies! I know—some one has been hurting your feelings. Believe me, my dears, even I did not always get just the partner my heart was set on! And I cried over it in secret, just like any other little girl. That is life, you know—we can't give up before it. Now smooth yourselves and come down, for some of them are leaving."

She blew them a kiss and went off smiling. After a dejected silence Dora took up the forget-me-not wreath and replaced it.

"I suppose we might as well finish out this evening," she said. "But the revolution has begun, Cora!"

"The revolution has begun," Cora echoed.

In the drawing-room they found Mrs. Baldwin talking with Mr. Morton and Mr. White. They were evidently trying to say good night, but she was holding them as inexorably as if she had laid hands on their coats; or so it seemed to the troubled twins. She summoned her daughters with her bright, amused glance.

"My dears," she said, "these two good friends were going to run away just because they do not dance the cotillon. We can't allow that. Suppose you take them to the library and make them wholly comfortable. Indeed, they have danced enough, Mr. White; I am thankful to have them stop and rest for a while. I will take the blame if their partners are angry.

She nodded a smiling dismissal. Disconcerted, wholly ill at ease, the four went obediently to the library, deserted now that the cotillon was beginning. The two men struggled valiantly with the conversation, but the

twins sat stricken to shamed dumbness: no topic could thrive in the face of their mute rigidity. Silences stalked the failing efforts. Mr. White's eyes clung to the clock while his throat dilated with secret yawns; Mr. Morton twisted restlessly and finally let a nervous sigh escape. Dora suddenly clasped her hands tightly together.

"We hate it just as much as you do," she said distinctly.

They turned startled faces toward her. Cora paled, but flew to her sister's aid.

"We knew you didn't want to come," she added with tremulous frankness. "We would have let you off if we could. If you want to go now, we won't be—hurt."

They rose, and so did the bewildered visitors.

"I am afraid you have—misunderstood," began Mr. White.

"No; we have always understood—everybody," said Dora, "but we pretended not to, because mother— But now we have done with society. It is a revolution, and this is our

last party. Good night." She held out her hand.

"Good night," repeated Cora, offering hers. The guests took them with the air of culprits; relief was evidently drowned in astonishment.

"Well, good night—if we must," they said awkwardly.

Mrs. Baldwin, looking into the library half an hour later, found the twins sitting there alone.

"Where are your cavaliers?" she demanded.

"They left long ago," Dora explained sleepily. "Mayn't we go to bed?"

"Oh, for pity's sake—go!" was the exasperated answer.

In the morning the twins appeared braced for revolution. When a reception for that afternoon was mentioned, they announced firmly that they were not going.

"I think you are wise," said Mrs. Baldwin amiably. "You both look tired."

They were conscious of disappointment

as well as relief; it was the establishment of a principle they wanted, not coddling. Three weeks went by in the same debilitating peace. The twins were smiled on and left wholly free. They had almost come to believe in a bloodless victory, when Mrs. Baldwin struck—a masterly attack where they were weakest. Her weapon was—not welcome temper, but restrained pathos.

"A mere fourteen at dinner and a few coming in to dance afterward, and I do want you twinnies to be there. Now I have not asked one thing of you for three weeks; don't you think you owe Mother some little return?"

"But—!" began the twins, with a rush of the well-known arguments. Mrs. Baldwin would not combat.

"I ask it as a favor, dear girls," she said gently. They clung to their refusal, but were obviously weakening when she rose to her climax: "Mr. White and Mr. Morton have accepted!" She left them with that, confident and humming to herself.

The twins stared at each other in open

misery. Reappear now, after the solemn declaration they had made to those two! Their cheeks burned at the thought. They mounted to their room to formulate their resistance, and found two exquisite new gowns, suitable for fairy princesses, spread out like snares. "To please Mother" seemed to be written on every artful fold. And Mrs. Baldwin was not a rich woman, for her way of life; such gowns meant self-denial somewhere. The twins had tears in their eyes.

"But if we give in now, we're lost!" they cried.

Nothing more was said about the dinner, Mrs. Baldwin gayly assuming success, but avoiding the topic. The twins wore a depressed and furtive air. On the fatal day they had a long interview with Miss Browne, of the Browne School, and came away solemn with excitement, to shut themselves in their room for the rest of the afternoon.

A few minutes before the dinner-hour Mrs. Baldwin, triumphant in satin and lace, paused at their door.

"Ready, twinnies?" she began, then stared as though disbelieving her eyes. In the glow of the student lamp sat the twins, books in their hands and piled high on the table beside them; their smooth, dark hair was unpompadoured, their shoulders were lost in the dark blouses of every day.

"What does this mean?" Mrs. Baldwin asked shortly, fire in her eyes.

"Mother, we told you we could not go to any more parties, and why," Cora answered, a note of pleading in her voice.

"We begin teaching on Monday in Miss Browne's school," added Dora more stoutly. "We have tried your way for years and years, mother. Now we have to try ours."

Mrs. Baldwin's lace bertha rose and fell sharply.

"Indeed. I am sorry to disappoint you, but so long as you live under my roof, you will have to conform to the ways of my household."

"Then, mother, we cannot stay under your roof."

"As you please! I leave the choice entirely to you." She swept out, leaving them breathless but resolute.

"I am glad of it!" said Dora with trembling lips.

In explaining their absence at dinner, Mrs. Baldwin was lightly humorous about the twins' devotion: one could not weather a headache without the other. Mr. White and Mr. Morton exchanged glances, and showed interest in the topic, as if they were on the track of some new sociological fact.

Later in the evening the twins, their spirits restored, stole to the top of the stairs and peered down at the whirling couples, exultant not to be among them. Mr. White was standing just below, and he glanced up, as if he might have been listening. His face brightened.

"May I come up?" he signaled, and mounted two steps at a time, keen interest in his thin, intellectual face.

"Is it really headache, or is it revolution?" he asked without preface. "Morton

and I have been longing to know, all the evening."

"Revolution," said the twins.

"How very interesting! Do you know, we came to-night just to see if you would be there. You—you staggered us, the other evening. We were glad when you didn't appear —if you won't misunderstand. It is so unexpected, in this environment. I shall be curious to see how far you can carry it out." He was leaning against the banister, looking at them as if they were abstract propositions rather than young girls, and they felt unwontedly at ease.

"To the very end," Dora asserted. "We begin teaching Monday, and—and we have to find a place to board." Her color rose a little, but she smiled.

"That *is* plucky," he commented. "We can help you there; I know a number of places. When do you want to move?"

"To-morrow," they answered in unison.

He consulted an engagement-book, reflected a few moments, then made a note.

"Morton or I will call for you to-mor-

row at three," he announced with businesslike brevity. "I think I know just the place, but we will give you a choice. If you really wish to move in at once, you could have your things packed, ready to be sent for."

"Oh, we do!" said Cora. He glanced meditatively at their fine and glowing faces.

"Of course you won't be comfortable, luxurious, as you are here," he warned them, with a nod toward the great paneled hall. Mrs. Baldwin passed the drawing-room door below with the stately tread of a reviewing officer on duty.

"Oh, we don't care!" they exclaimed eagerly.

The next day their mother treated the twins as if they were not. She spoke no word to them and did not seem to hear their husky little efforts at reconciliation. They found it hard to remember persistently that they were revolutionists rather than children in disgrace. She was unapproachable in her own room when Mr. White and Mr. Morton came for them.

"Well, we can't help it," they said sadly

as they locked their two trunks and went down the stairs.

Three hours later the twins had entered a new world and were rapturously making an omelet in a kitchen that had begun life as a closet, while Mr. Morton put up shelves and hooks and Mr. White tacked green burlap over gloomy wall paper. Groceries and kitchen utensils and amusing makeshift furniture kept arriving in exciting profusion. They had not dreamed that there was such happiness in the world.

"If only mother will forgive us, it will be simply perfect!" they told each other when they settled down for the night in their hard little cots. They said that many times in the days that followed their revolution. The utter joy of work and freedom and simplicity had no other blemish.

For five weeks Mrs. Baldwin remained obdurate. Then, one Sunday afternoon, she appeared, cold, critical, resentful still; lifted her eyebrows at the devices of their light housekeeping; looked disgusted when they pointed out

from the window the little café where they sometimes dined; and offered to consent to their social retirement if they would give up the teaching and come home. The twins were troubled and apologetic, but inflexible. They had found the life they were meant for: they could not give it up. If she knew how happy they were!

"How, with your bringing up, you can enjoy this!" she marveled. "It isn't respectable—eating in nasty little holes alone at night!"

"But it is a nice, clean place, and Mr. White and Mr. Morton are nearly always with us," Dora began, then broke off at an expression of pleased enlightenment that flashed across her mother's face. "They are just very good friends," she explained gravely; "they don't take us as girls at all—that is why we have such nice times with them. We are simply comrades, and interested in the same books and problems."

"And they bother about us chiefly because we are a sort of sociological demonstra-

tion to them," Cora added. "They like experiments of every kind."

"Ah, yes, I understand," assented Mrs. Baldwin. "Well, you certainly are fixed up very nicely here. If you want anything from home, let me know. After all, it is a piquant little adventure. If you are happy in it, I suppose I ought not to complain."

She was all complacence and compliment the rest of her visit. When she went away, the girls glanced uneasily at each other.

"She took a wrong idea in her head," said Dora. "I do hope we undeceived her. It would be hard for her to understand how wholly mental and impersonal our friendship is with those two."

"Well, she will see in time, when nothing comes of it," said Cora confidently. "That's their ring, now. Oh, Dora, isn't our life nice!"

Mrs. Baldwin, passing down the shabby front steps, might have seen the two men approaching, one with an armful of books and the other with a potted plant; but she apparently

did not recognize them, for she stepped into her carriage without a sign. The visit seemed to have left a pleasant memory with her, however; her bland serenity, as she drove away, was not unlike that of the cat which has just swallowed the canary.

X

The Riper Years

MAIDA had been home an hour before the subject was broached. Her mother, following her nervously from room to room, could not tell whether it was in her mind or not; she was gay, alert, a little boyish, just as she always was on her yearly return from college; interested in the new dining-room wall paper and the private bathroom that was her special surprise; brief and uncommunicative about the details of her graduation but eloquent over the tennis finals—to all appearances as unreproachful and friendly as her letters had shown her. Mrs. Hamilton herself flushed pink at every pause, absently repeated her questions, and listened to Maida's talk with wide, troubled eyes and a fixed smile; the tenderness of her frequent "Yes, dear!" was very close to tears.

The photograph on her dressing table

finally brought them to it. Maida picked it up and looked with smiling inscrutability at the solemn, kindly, middle-aged face.

"Well?" she said.

It came out in a torrent, all that Mrs. Hamilton had been rehearsing during the uneasy days of expectation.

"You know, dear, I won't do it for one moment if it is in any way distasteful to you. I wrote you that, and the Judge understands it perfectly. Your letters were lovely, Maida—they might so easily have been a little unkind, and, indeed, I should have understood it. To a girl of your age it might seem rather—shocking, perhaps; or ridiculous. I want you to be frank with me, my dear girl. I shall never consciously do anything that would spoil your home for you." And two tears ran suddenly down the smooth, delicate little face. Maida, always embarrassed before emotion, kept her eyes on the photograph.

"Why, mother, I have no objection," she said cheerfully. "Judge Reynolds is a fine old chap—I shall like having him about

the house, if you don't mind him." Her eyes met her mother's in a fleeting glance. "I'm not sentimental, you know; I shouldn't want any one—that way—myself. But if you do—well, then, I'm jolly glad you've got it." She put the picture down and gave her mother's shoulder a furtive pat, which was as near as she ever willingly came to a caress. "He's a first-rate man; I respect him a lot," she added.

Happy relief set Mrs. Hamilton blooming.

"Oh, yes, Maida, he is a remarkable man. In a bigger place, with wider opportunities, he would be very famous. As it is, the whole county comes to him for his opinion. And he's so courageous, Maida! Never afraid to say exactly what he believes. Why, a big corporation once tried—" Her earnest voice faltered and paused before the glimmer of a grin on her daughter's face. "Anybody would tell you exactly the same things; I am not biased, dear, truly," she urged, flushing. The glimmer was dutifully repressed, though it still lurked close to the surface.

"Of course, he's splendid," Maida assented. "By the way, does Billy come with him?"

"Oh, no; he will take rooms somewhere. He has been very sweet and nice—it makes me very happy, Maida, that both our children take it so—so kindly."

"Oh, it's all right. I'm glad if you are," Maida reassured her. When her mother was called away, a few minutes later, the glimmer returned; she picked up the photograph again and studied with twinkling eyes the solid citizen it represented. Across the back was boldly written, "For Fanny," and a quotation beginning, "Unto the riper years—" Maida hastily put it down.

"Oh, Lord!" she murmured.

One afternoon two weeks later Maida frankly posted herself at the garden gate toward six o'clock, when a blaze of curly red hair and a short pipe usually signaled the passing of her future stepbrother. His droll face, like a narrow block of white wood curiously carved, creased into a smile at sight of her.

"I was waiting for you, Billy; I want to have a talk with you," Maida said, opening the gate.

"Why didn't you pretend that the meeting was accidental, and start with surprise? I should have felt more flattered," he suggested, following her across the lawn to an ancient latticed summer-house.

"Why should I bother to flatter you, Billy Reynolds?" Maida demanded.

"Well, girls always do. Besides, I expect to hand you out numerous bouquets."

"It will be a change. You slapped me once in this very summer-house."

"And I dare say I shall again. I certainly shall if you bite my thumb half off, as you did that day."

"It was your own fault for trying to cover two thirds of the chocolate with it. I only wanted my fair half."

"Well, I will send you up a cake of Peter's, if that is what you called me in about." They both laughed.

"No; I wanted to talk to you about

your father. Truly, Billy, you have got to make him behave."

"What on earth is he doing? I'd run a mile to see him actually misbehave," he added with an eagerness whose roots lay deep in his own past.

"He stays too late," said Maida with indignation. "Mother always wakes up at dawn anyway, and here he is keeping her up till eleven and twelve four nights a week—it's too much for her. She can't sleep daytimes, and she is getting so nervous and tired. I don't exactly like to pound on the floor or wind the hall clock, but—" Under Billy's hoot of laughter her frown melted into an answering laugh.

"I might come and take him home at ten," he suggested. "Why doesn't your mother fire him?"

"She promises to, but she's so afraid of hurting his feelings. Besides, you know——"

"Well?"

"Well, I think she sort of—likes having him. She wants him to stay." Billy hooted again at the reluctance of the admission.

"I suppose you never wanted any one to stay, yourself!"

"Certainly not, after a sensible hour!"

He looked at her meditatively. "It might be good sport to—enlighten your dense ignorance." His tone was derisive, but some expression in his red-brown eyes made her frown restively.

"Oh, we will leave all that to our parents," she said impatiently. "But couldn't you give your father a hint?"

There was humor in the slow shake of his head. "I don't see myself doing it, someway."

"Well, then, I suppose I shall have to. I am not going to have her all worn out." She rose with a definiteness that brought him reluctantly to his feet.

"You don't have any trouble sending people home yourself, do you!" he commented.

"Of course not," said Maida, wholly missing the application. He smiled to himself as he held out his hand.

"You're a fine, strong woman, Maida,"

he said. "It's splendid characters like you that pass bills through the legislature and get the suffrage and all that. But sometimes you splendid characters get something else, just the samie. And get it bad." Maida resentfully drew away her hand.

"Oh, good *night,*" she said.

When the Judge, with his solemn shyness and his top hat, mounted the steps the following evening, the somewhat rakish figure of his son lounged in his wake.

"Father bribed me to come and keep you out of the way to-night," he announced to Maida, who opened the wire door for them.

"My dear Will! How can you tell such an untruth!" The Judge was red with righteous wrath. "I assure you, Maida——"

"Oh, I know Billy!" she comforted him. "I never believe him. Mother is in the sitting room, Judge Reynolds. I am going out to weed the pansies, Billy—you may come if you like."

"But I am calling on you," he protested as the Judge, superhumanly erect and

still slightly glowering, entered the sitting room. "You can't go about your chores just as if you were alone."

"Why not?"

"When you have been home a little longer, Maida, you will realize that a man caller is not to be taken lightly or forced to weed the garden. They give him the best chair here and make him lemonade and— What is it?" For Maida was staring after the Judge with a look of incredulous dismay. Yet the tableau seen through the half-open door was not a surprising one under the circumstances.

"Boys will be boys, you know," Billy reminded her gravely. "We have to be patient with the young people, my dear."

Maida turned to the dusky garden. "Oh, it's all right if they like it," she said with an expressive wrinkling of her nose. "One comfort, you can take him home early to-night and let mother get some sleep."

"Exactly why I came—" Billy seated himself on the steps and took out a cigarette— "only I'm not going so infernally early my-

self," he added, his tone decided but his eye cautiously inquiring.

"I couldn't do the pansies to-day, it was so hot," said Maida, kneeling before a gold and purple bed beside the steps.

"I said," repeated Billy with cold emphasis, "that I was not going home so infernally early myself."

"Well?"

"Haven't you the manners to express pleasure at the news?" She laughed in spite of herself.

"I'll tell you how I feel about it later in the evening," she said.

Promptly at ten o'clock the Judge was interrupted in the story of an important legal battle by the entrance of the young people with a pitcher of lemonade. Twenty minutes later, as he walked home with his son, he commented approvingly on this sweet little daughterly act.

"Maida is a very thoughtful girl," he added contentedly.

"Oh, yes, she's thoughtful," Billy assented. He seemed depressed.

Billy came frequently after that, and the Judge, being a methodical person, soon fell into the way of taking his departure shortly after ten, whether his son were there or not. But having plenty of time for sleep did not produce the expected effect on Mrs. Hamilton. She seemed to become daily more wan, more nervous, and her appetite, always small, disappeared altogether. Maida watched her with indignant anxiety.

"Why don't they marry and get it over with? What is the sense of waiting till October?" she demanded of Billy one evening; she was mounted on a ladder, training and pruning the vines with which the old summer-house was heaped up and running over, while he sat on the step beneath discontentedly watching her. His good spirits seemed to have deserted him of late.

"You're always so busy," he complained. "Why can't you sit down here and be sociable like anybody else?"

"Oh, I like to get things done." The scissors snapped energetically and several long

sprays of honeysuckle fell about his head. "But about mother and the Judge—why don't they?"

"I believe the idea was to let you down easy—give you a summer to get used to the idea."

"Well, I'd rather cut that out and have a sane and orderly household. We have had steak three times this week because mother forgot that she ordered it before, and half the time there's no butter for breakfast or not an egg in the house. She has given up eating, herself, and the consequence is— Oh, I think engaged people are dreadful!"

Billy was weaving the honeysuckle sprays into a wreath.

"I don't have any trouble with the old boy," he observed. "He eats and sleeps about as usual."

"Men have a little sense," Maida conceded, coming down to move her ladder. When she had finished her work she sat on the step beside him and submitted indifferently to having the honeysuckle wreath placed on her hair.

His hands lingered over the task, his eyes resting gravely on her clear profile.

"I must train the vines on the wood-shed to-morrow," said Maida. His hand fell with exasperated heaviness on her shoulder.

"Woman, wake up!" he exclaimed. "Here it is a night full of stars, and you look like a dream princess with your hair full of flowers—and you talk about the wood-shed! Don't you ever see an inch beyond the practical?"

She drew away resentfully from his hand. "You needn't knock me over," she protested. He sighed.

"Well, I said I should probably slap you again on this historic spot," he said more mildly. His quaint, comedian face looked old and tired in the dim light. Maida turned away from it frowning, but her eyes came back to it again and again in the half hour of silence that followed.

"I can't help it, Billy," she said suddenly.

"I know you can't, dearest." It was

spoken so quietly and naturally, that amazing word, that she could not take offense, could not even seem to notice it; and yet it was disturbing. She almost forgot his presence as she sat turning it over, wondering at it, throwing it angrily away, and then curiously picking it up again. Dearest—strange little word to have so big an echo!

She was startled back to the present by the appearance of the reformed Judge.

"After ten, Will; time to be going. We old people can't sit up like you young ones," he added innocently. Maida looked self-conscious, but Will laughed outright.

Mrs. Hamilton had already gone to her room when Maida went in. The girl's sleep was broken and troubled that night, and whenever she wakened she had a sense of sighs and uneasy turnings in the next room. Starting up from a doze as the clock struck three, she saw a light under her mother's door. She rose in wrath.

"Why aren't you asleep?" she demanded from the doorway.

"It seems to me—rather close." Her mother spoke guiltily, and the eyes she lifted from her book were unmistakably tear-stained. Maida stumped severely to the windows, opening them wider and fastening back the curtains. With her back to her mother she took the plunge.

"If you're waiting till October on my account," she began abruptly, "I wish you wouldn't. I should much prefer it right now."

"There is no hurry; October will do very well." Mrs. Hamilton spoke quietly, a little coldly, her eyes on her book, but Maida was sure that the firmly closed lips would quiver helplessly at another word. She turned uncertainly back to her own room.

"Well, good night. Do sleep," she urged.

They avoided each other's eyes in the morning, but it was quite clear that Mrs. Hamilton was unhappy. Maida tried to cheer her with references to the Judge's sterling qualities, but, after a wan assent, her mother seemed to sink deeper than ever into depression. Then

Maida turned firmly to cheerful topics of general interest, and invited her mother to go to drive. But it was a weary drive, talking to deaf ears and pointing out the beauties of nature to sad little elderly eyes that more than once filled with tears. Maida knew that she ought boldly to demand the cause, but her horror of sentimental confidences was still too strong.

"He has hurt her feelings or something; engaged people are always like that," she reassured herself.

The next day was a little better. Mrs. Hamilton became quite cheerful after supper as she sat in spotless precision waiting for the Judge. Maida, sitting on the front steps, found herself watching for two figures; whereupon she rose impatiently and sought a hoe.

"Idiocy seems to be contagious," she muttered, going viciously at the weeds under the hollyhocks. Mrs. Hamilton came out presently and stood watching her from the porch.

"They are late to-night," said Maida cheerfully.

"Yes; he is always here before this." The brief brightness had left Mrs. Hamilton's face. Maida's next slash nearly laid low a hollyhock. She went indoors presently, but all the evening she could not lose consciousness of the frail little figure sitting motionless on the veranda.

At nine o'clock she gripped the situation.

"Something must have detained him," she said, coming out and seating herself on the balustrade.

"Yes; it is very much what I have been expecting." Mrs. Hamilton's voice sounded dim and hopeless.

"Expecting?"

"Yes, Maida. I think it has all been a—a mistake." Maida was startled out of her horror of confidences.

"You don't want to do it?"

"Oh, no, dear! I mean, yes—it is not that. But I think the Judge—I have been noticing for some weeks—I am an old woman, Maida, and it was folly to suppose I could—

hold such a—such an important man. I understand perfectly—" The poor little voice faltered.

" But, mother, he seems so happy and satisfied; and this is the first night he has missed coming," Maida urged. Mrs. Hamilton bravely dried her eyes.

" I know, dear. But I have been noticing he—he does not stay nearly so long as he used to. And I think he sometimes—I don't mean this unkindly—but I think he sometimes brings his son just so as to—to break it up in good season. I am not speaking in blame—I understand perfectly. But it has—it has kept me from sleeping so well, and so I suppose I am—easily upset. You must excuse me, dear." A sob broke from her and she went blindly into the house. Maida stared after her in sick dismay. So this was what she had wrought; and she had meant so well!

The gate clicked and a footstep on the gravel sent a curious pang, half pleasant, half terrifying, through her left side. It passed abruptly as she recognized the Judge. He was

in business clothes and an unwonted air of the day's disorder hung about him.

"Good evening, Maida. Am I too late to come in?" he asked apologetically. "I was kept downtown until now——"

Maida clutched her courage in both hands.

"I am glad you came—I want to speak to you. Judge Reynolds, I don't think mother is very well. I think she ought to go away for a few weeks." He looked so dismayed that she could have embraced him. "Being engaged seems to be a great strain," she went on bravely. "I wish that—October were not so far away." His face lit up.

"Why, my dear, your mother thought that you— Well, really, there is no fixed law about October. So far as that goes, next week would—" She grasped his arm.

"Go and tell her that," she whispered. Then she ran down into the garden, leaving him to find the way in.

A whistle from the gate brought again that curious stab of expectancy. She was ab-

sorbed in unscrewing the hose when Will came through the shrubbery.

"Is my father here?" he asked. "I have been waiting all the evening to chaperon him."

"Oh, he's here!" said Maida dryly.

"Misbehaving?"

"Not exactly. But if ever I have anything to do with engaged people again!"

"But you will—you can't help yourself!" It was not too dark for him to see a sudden tide of color in her face. He came and took the hose from her. "Let me help you, dearest," he said, his air entirely practical as he knelt down by the faucet. The little word echoed and reverberated about her.

"Don't you call me that!" she cried desperately. Will, at her feet, smiled to himself.

XI

Nature

"BACK to nature—that is what she needs," commanded the doctor, and Louise, unconsulted and disconsolate, was straightway transported to the wilds by her anxiously concerned father. Once established, with her mother and a servant, in a borrowed pine cabin, with Bald Mountain towering high above them and Loon Lake shimmering beneath, she interpreted the doctor's words as a literal command to turn her back to nature, and turned it with defiant persistence.

"It's no use; I don't like the woods, and I never have and I never shall!" she was goaded into exclaiming after forty-eight hours had dragged, one by one, over her head. "And I haven't slept any better than at Westering," she added with covert triumph.

Mrs. Russell looked up from her book

with a smile that was amused, faintly derisive, and wholly untouched by responsibility.

"How silly you are, Louise!" she commented, and her eyes returned to the page without expectation of an answer. Louise sighed fretfully, but attempted none. She did not even feel resentful for more than half a minute; it was impossible to cherish anger against a person so aloof and so exquisitely handsome as her fine, dark-haired mother, especially when one was—well, "more like the father," it was kindly expressed.

Nature, whose radiant morning had been ignored, had withdrawn behind a fine veil of rain. A hearty pattering on the cabin roof would have had its own charm, but this soundless, clinging, almost invisible misting seemed to Louise funereal. The great pines about them dripped solemnly at long intervals; drenched witch-hazels made the paths impassable; the hammock on the porch was as clammily damp as though it were not under cover. A log fire made the living room the only habitable spot, and, convinced that any hope of diversion was

over for that day, she got out the bundle of books that her father had placed in her trunk. Their titles filled her with fresh exasperation: "Bird Notes," "The Insect World," "Denizens of the Forest," "Nature's Children," "The Heart of the Wild." She pushed them angrily away, and her eyes were full of hot tears, partly because she hated them, partly because a sudden vision of her anxious, careful father, earnestly selecting these dreary volumes and carrying them home himself lest they should not arrive in time, hurt her inexplicably. His devotion had always held this uncomprehended pang for her, even in the days when he buttoned her leggings in the morning and started her off to school, or hurried home from the office to help her with her arithmetic. Close on her impatience now came a compassionate need to put her arms about him and tell him how good he was, and she fell to thinking how, if he were dead instead of merely returned to the city, this need would be deepened to a haunting passion of regret that she had not done it oftener; and so, when her mother chanced to

glance up from the pages of Pierre Loti, she saw symptoms that had grown dismally familiar of late—scarlet eyelids and wet cheeks. She closed the book over a tentative forefinger.

"I will play backgammon with you, if you like, Louise," she volunteered, after a moment of silent consideration. Louise hastily averted her face, not knowing herself discovered.

"I think I will write to papa now; I am in the mood for it—thank you, mother."

Mrs. Russell returned to her book without comment.

Louise's nervous disorder had not been brought about by the usual dissipations of her age. Although she was twenty-one, she had never "come out." She had confidently expected to when she left school, three years before. When she brought up the subject, her mother, after hearing her, had mused for a disconcerting interval on the eager face that not even the fresh skin of youth could beautify.

"Why, you may come out if you want to, Louise," she had said finally, "but I don't

believe you would be a success; you never have got on at all with boys. You would not enjoy coming out and being a wallflower, would you?"

Most emphatically Louise would not have enjoyed being a wallflower—the word had sent a flush up to her smooth brown hair. Her mother's verdict left a gash, but she did not dream of appealing from it; the subject was never brought up again. So she had given her days to girl friends and desultory studies, embroidery and horseback riding and fitful philanthropy, spending six months in town and six in Westering, an expensive suburb with lawns and paved sidewalks, where she did very much the same things as in the city. And when a man had crossed her way, she had remembered that she was not born to success and had sat passive until he drifted past. If he stayed, it was because he had fallen in love with her mother, whose wonderful eyebrows, slim and mobile as little black serpents, would presently take a bored, derisive arch at the discovery, and so send him away writhing. Why, out of such

a tame, hygienic order of life, Louise should suddenly develop hysterics and insomnia, only nature could explain; and so, logically enough, it was to nature that she had been sent. The doctor was elderly and conventional, and even the girl herself did not realize that the wrong kind of nature had been chosen.

The drizzle had stopped by the time Louise had finished her letter; there were signs of light in the west, giving hope of a sunset. She started up.

"I am going down to mail this myself," she announced. "Papa said the trail was perfectly plain."

"A good idea," said her mother absently. It was Annie who insisted on rubbers. Annie's hair was spun amber and her eyes were blue delft, and her place was that of upper housemaid, but she had cheerfully deserted her sphere and unnumbered followers to come up into the wilds as cook, from devotion to her handsome, impassive mistress. Louise, as one of Mrs. Russell's belongings, was briskly looked after.

The pensive, earthy odors of autumn rising from the sodden trail were sweetened and glorified by a burst of golden light as Louise set out; the leaves of the witch-hazels were turned to shining, glancing mirrors. An early frost had set the maples flaming, and already the blaze was spreading to oak and beech and aspen. The chain of little dipping hills across the lake looked like Persian rugs hung on slack clothes lines. Louise paused to laugh at the simile, forgetting for the moment her boredom and her unconquerable dislike of the woods.

She had not seen him until her laugh made him look up; and then she found herself looking down into two of the bluest eyes ever set in a brown face, a dark blue, yet of such sapphire clearness that she saw color before outline. The man was kneeling on the trail, tying the last knots in a heavy bundle that he had evidently been repacking. His brown canvas suit showed him, as he rose, magnificently tall and straight, his head set above his broad shoulders with the ease of a stag's, his features

shaped with the grave beauty of ancient sculpture. For the moment Louise could only stare. She had never looked on a man like this, and the next twenty steps were as twenty epochs of her experience. So far did they carry her that, from a first tremulous wonder whether she might not venture a bow in passing, she jumped to panic lest he should go before she could speak.

"Is this the trail to the post office?" she asked hurriedly, with fluttering color and her heart struggling at her throat.

He paused before answering, not, evidently, in doubt, but because his ways were deliberate; and in that moment the simplicity of his amazing beauty stabbed her with glorious pain, like the sight of a great deed. Then fate dealt her the sharpest blow of her life, a blow that left her dazed, gasping, wholly uncomprehending, yet crushed under some awful, nameless disappointment.

"Yes, marm," he said.

After a blank recoil, she sped on, the shamed dread of a burst of tears hurrying her

feet. Once hidden in the woods, she dropped down on a log and sobbed recklessly.

"It's all dreadful!" she stormed. "Nothing is for me, nothing is ever for me!" The meaning of her own words startled and arrested her. She repeated them, as though listening to a verdict, then cried again, dismally, in poignant self-pity: "Nothing, nothing!" She accepted it hopelessly. Her letter to her father was in her hand, but it did not occur to her to wonder what there had been for him, or for anyone else. To her young wretchedness, it seemed that everyone else had everything life could offer; only she was isolated and a failure.

The lamp was already lighted when she dragged herself listlessly up the trail again, an hour later. Her mother's eyebrows curved delicately at sight of her muddy skirt.

"Why didn't you hold it up?" she asked, not in reproof, but in cool wonder that anyone could be so unfastidious.

"It was too much trouble," was the sullen answer. Mrs. Russell's glance touched

for an instant the pale, heavy face, then fell to the book in her hand.

"I don't expect you to like it, Louise," she began, smoothing the page back with her palm before lifting it into the light, "but I have engaged a guide to take you for an excursion every day. Annie will go, too. He will be here at ten in the morning." And she would have begun reading, but Louise's startled questions interrupted:

"A guide? Where did you get him?"

"He came this afternoon with a letter from Mrs. Harrison—they are breaking up their camp at Big Moose, and she thought we might need some one. His name is Anderson." She waited courteously for the further questions with which her daughter was evidently struggling.

"Did he—was he—" she could not ask —"was he beautiful as a god?" and so concluded lamely, "You liked his looks?"

"Naturally; or I should not have engaged him."

Louise turned dazedly to her own room.

"He's only a guide," she told herself, but that strange sense of blank loss was tossed aside like her wet skirt. Life was not so empty, after all. It would be something just to look on beauty like that.

It *was* something. It was an exhilaration keen as though the thin, sharp, dry sunlight were champagne to the spirit when she peeped out between the curtains at ten o'clock the next morning and saw him standing at his magnificent ease. Annie, her spun amber hair bared to the brightness, her garb of neat maidservant oddly incongruous with her alpenstock, was talking to him with a slightly critical patronage.

"I'd die for lonesomeness up here, but I don't suppose you're used to anything different," she was saying.

Louise stepped out with a suppressed skip. She no more understood her sudden gayety than she understood the depression of the past months. Perhaps she had never understood anything about herself very clearly since her mother's gashing verdict on the subject of "coming out"—poor, impulsive, trustful little

girl in grown-up clothes that she was! She had lived three years under the saddening shadow of that word "failure" without once dreaming that anything might have been done about it. Now all she realized was that, suddenly, it was fun to be alive. Her voice had a brimming gayety.

"Good morning, Anderson!" The passive sobriety of his "Morning!" did not chill her; she felt curiously like a joyous mote dancing before a kindly, solemn sun. "Where shall you take us?" she asked, happily ready for anything.

He reflected, and she watched him, thinking, "One could die for a man like that!"

"Been up the Ridge yet?" he finally asked.

"No. I've never been anywhere—in all my life," she wanted to add.

"Guess that'll do, then."

They set out up a rocky trail, Annie falling respectfully to the rear, but muttering disrespectfully as stones slipped under her feet and briers scratched her sleeve. Anderson

went ahead of Louise in Indian silence, pausing occasionally to indicate that there was a view, and she could look at it if she liked. Her bursts of enthusiasm were accepted placidly as manifestations appropriate to a woman but scarcely interesting to a man. He utilized the pauses by breaking twigs and closely examining the fracture, turning over bits of rock with thoughtful interest, running his hand inquiringly along the trunks of trees.

"What is it you are looking for? What are you finding out?" she finally asked him.

"W-e-ll, I—don't—know," was the slow answer. "Kind of a habit, I guess." He picked up a tiny brown pine-cone and held it out to her on his great palm. "Nice little feller, ain't it!" he commented.

"*Intelligent about nature and probably kind to children,*" some voice deep down in Louise's consciousness seemed to record. She took the cone with a rather absurd enthusiasm and presently slipped it into her pocket.

The trail grew steep and hot and Annie

spluttered into open complaint. Louise would have laughed at her, but Anderson stepped back and helped her in a way that made the secret voice cry out, *"Patient, chivalrous!"* with a ring of triumph. The words were addressed more to a disdainful image of her mother than to herself.

Their climb terminated on a rocky shelf that hung over a lavish prospect of lakes and glowing hillsides. Here they sat and rested, Annie prophetically mending a rent in her skirt while their guide explored a crevice with his jackknife. Louise's eyes soon left the view for the unconscious profile on her left, and again the man's beauty brought that baffling sense of pain and loss. Was there no way that a creature like this could be reclaimed—could be made over into a gentleman?

"Have you always lived up here?" she asked.

"Yes, marm," was the disheartening answer. The recoil left her silent, but Annie was moved to know—with a shudder—how he existed through the winters.

"Oh, the winters are first rate," he explained, looking across indulgently at the taut, protesting figure. "There's hunt'n' and log-g'n' daytimes, and I read a lot. I'm a great hand for books."

"Oh, you are?" Louise's dulled face was relit. "What sort of books?" *"A man who reads can become anything,"* the secret voice was declaring.

"Did you ever read the life of General Ulysses S. Grant?"

"His autobiography? Yes, indeed."

"Ain't that a book, though! And I've read General Sherman's life, and two books about George Washington. I admire great men," he concluded simply. In the glamour of the moment, this seemed to her a striking sentiment.

"I do, too," she assented with enthusiasm. "Perhaps we have some books at the cabin that you would enjoy."

"I'd like to try 'em first-rate," he assented; and the secret voice added a proud *"Intellectually ambitious!"* to its testimony.

" Read'n's a great thing," he went on, his wonderful face gravely kindled. " Why, y'know, if you was to offer me my choice of a book or a turkey dinner, I'd take the book! "

It was an admirable choice, but elation fell dismally, and the secret voice had nothing to say. After a chilled silence, Louise rose.

" We must go back," she said sadly, and started on ahead. The guide followed with Annie, who needed incessant help and gave little thanks for it.

A week of sun and wind, of lake and mountain, obviously did marvels for Louise. Her step lost its protesting drag, she laughed easily and forgot her manifold complaints. Sometimes, with hair roughened and color blown into her cheeks, she looked almost pretty, and she knew it, and rejoiced. The secret voice had swelled to a steady chorus of praise; and surely, if all the splendors of character as well as of physique belong to a man—her thoughts usually broke off here, leaving her gasping; but she was given to small flings at social position and the minor advantages in these days.

Sunday brought a gap in the excursions, and a corresponding gap in her mood. Doubts that the excitement of the daily encounter kept down had their chance now, and took it relentlessly. In the late afternoon, after an unhappy walk by herself, she went desperately to her mother.

"Mother! Don't people sometimes marry people of—of a totally different class of life?"

"I believe they do."

"And suppose that—that the heart and character are all right—do you think that a lack of education is a—a fatal barrier?" Louise's face was burning with eagerness.

"I am afraid I do, Louise. You see, if a man marries a woman of no advantages, he can't go on, himself. He will always be held down by her."

"But suppose he didn't want to go on?" she burst out. "Suppose he wanted to—to be a peasant, too, and lead a peasant's life with her? Suppose that would make him absolutely happy? Then wouldn't it be all right?"

"For a few months—perhaps a year. Not longer."

"I think that is cynical," Louise protested hotly. "Carrie Madden married her father's chauffeur," she added, as her mother attempted no defense.

"And have you any knowledge as to how Carrie Madden is liking it?"

"No," Louise had to admit, turning restlessly away. She presently wandered out to the kitchen, where Annie, trim and blue-aproned, was preparing supper. The bright pine walls and Annie's bright head shone in the lamplight, the gay red apples in her lap, changing to fresh-cut white under her brisk hands, accented her sharp prettiness; but Louise was too self-absorbed to appreciate the picture. She perched on a corner of the table and helped herself to a slice of apple.

"We are going to row up to the falls to-morrow," she announced, for the sheer pleasure of hearing the news herself. "We'll have lunch there."

"If we don't tip over first." Annie

deeply distrusted the slender boats of the region.

"Oh, nonsense! Nothing could go wrong with Anderson in charge." Louise spoke with happy pride. "Did you ever see anyone so strong?"

"Well, he'd ought to be—big clodhopper like that," was the grudging response.

"He isn't a clodhopper, Annie! He is the most perfectly graceful man I have ever seen. You don't know what you are talking about."

Annie shifted her ground of attack. "He's that stiff and solemn! I like a man with some go to him, and a mustache."

"And curly blond hair?" Louise suggested ironically.

"Yes, that's it; and a tongue to give you a good smart answer." Annie's nod seemed to be directed affirmatively toward some special image, but was received full by their guide himself, who appeared at that moment in the square of light that fell across the threshold. Louise again had that sense of seeing the blue

of his eyes before she saw the eyes themselves, and a flush touched her face, leaving it lit and quickened. The guide had halted at sight of her, and he, too, showed an unmistakable blush. He stopped awkwardly outside, displaying a little battered brown volume.

"I thought I'd bring it back. I liked it a lot," he blurted out in hasty excuse. His embarrassment startled and thrilled her. With a new and brilliant sense of ease, she held out her hand for the book without rising, and so obliged him to come in. He did not even glance at Annie, whose brisk efficiency had taken on a tinge of conscious superiority.

"I am so glad you liked 'Walden.' My father is devoted to it," Louise rejoiced.

"I liked about the feller build'n' his own house," he explained conscientiously. "That's the part that took me."

She skimmed gayly away from further inquiry into Thoreau's success. "I must get you something else," she said, springing up. "Wouldn't you like me to?"

"First-rate, thank you." He was still

unwontedly constrained, and she flew off with a thought of giving him time. She needed time herself, for that betraying flush of his had swept her triumphantly over the day's barrier of doubts.

"Mother, Anderson likes 'Walden,'" she cried. Mrs. Russell did not seem adequately impressed by the news, so Louise repeated and dwelt on it. "And I've never even read it through myself!" she exulted as she turned back to the kitchen. "He is no common guide, you know!"

Mrs. Russell looked after her with a slightly puzzled expression. Even after she had returned to her book, a frown still lingered about her eyes.

Another long week went by, and the mote still danced in the solemn, kindly sunlight. Louise had ceased arguing and cataloguing traits, ceased struggling with decisions, and given herself wholly over to the magic of the hour. And yet, while her heart stirred, her mind stayed curiously unawakened. No child of eight ever dreamed more simply of a play-

house in the woods; Anderson's part therein was chiefly grave blue eyes through the dusk, a profile against the sky. The only unhappy moments came when her mother stepped out to speak to him, as she did almost daily, in her serene guise of fine lady consulting with excellent servitor. Then Louise winced and suffered and secretly cried out against the unfairness of a world that permitted social chasms. The very obviousness of the chasm had evidently smoothed the frown out of Mrs. Russell's thoughts; she had forgotten her momentary discomfort.

She was struck down, at the week's end, by one of her blinding headaches. Louise, with a heavy heart, offered to stay in and wait on her, but was told with wan courtesy that Annie would do it better.

"Get Anderson to take you out on the lake for an hour or two," she was commanded. "I don't want you to miss any good you can get."

Concern for the headache was physically impossible after that. Louise slipped off

to her room and, for the first time, cast aside the canvas and flannel of their daily excursion. It was not warm enough for summer dresses, but with furtive haste she chose a pale pink linen, suited to a garden party, and managed to hook it up unaided, having a shamed dread of comment.

Anderson blinked a little as she came out, and she hastened to explain.

"We are only going to row for an hour or two, Anderson. My mother has a headache, and Annie can't come. I must be back for luncheon."

"Hadn't you better bring along a coat?" he suggested. "Kinder sharp this morning."

Louise was growing up. A week before she would have protested that she was "roasting"; now she smiled and made frank confession:

"But I look so much nicer without it!"

"Won't nobody see you," was the matter-of-fact reply.

"Nobody?"

"Oh, I guess I don't count."

Joy suddenly ran over in effervescent laughter. "Oh, don't you?" she cried and flew down the path.

Anderson picked up a shawl that was lying over the rail and followed at his usual sober pace.

Mrs. Russell, who had been standing at her bedroom window for the sake of the cool air on her head, sank quickly into a chair as her daughter disappeared. The frown was back in good earnest, a frown of offense and repulsion, but also of dismay. She sat for a bewildered half hour with cold hands clinging to her hot head, and murmuring, "Oh, impossible!" at intervals. Then she rose and summoned the maid.

"We are going back to town to-morrow, Annie. Please begin to pack up."

"Well, that's good news, anyhow," was the lively comment.

The morning dragged by, and luncheon time came, but Louise had not returned. Mrs. Russell, ignoring her headache, went down to

the landing to look for her. The lake was long and winding, and set with little islands that obstructed the view; but there was no boat in sight.

"It's a mercy if they haven't tipped over," was Annie's cheering comment as she came slowly up the trail again. "Little boats like them—" but some look in her mistress's face checked her. "They'll be all right," she added consolingly. "Don't you worry, now. They'll be here in no time."

Mrs. Russell turned in silence to her own room and shut the door. It was not the fragility of little boats that was haunting her eyes and drawing her pale lips; it was her daughter's laugh and voice, the vivid change in her of late, some half-forgotten words of a week ago: "Carrie Madden married her father's chauffeur—" How fastidiously she had drawn away from that vulgar event, when everyone else was enjoying the shock! Some one in her hearing had blamed Carrie's parents. "They never gave her any fun, and a girl has to have something—it's nature!" She had met

the explanation with a glance of disdain, but she could not call it up now. She could only look frightened.

Three o'clock came, and four. If there had been another boat, she would have set out herself in search; but the last neighbor had closed his camp and gone, and she shrank unspeakably from turning to the little village. Annie, touched by her silent distress, haunted the landing, and she wandered back and forth through the empty house, long and trailing, like some tormented spirit. Happening to pause in her daughter's room, her eyes, absent at first, fell on a half-open drawer. A sharp realization that it had been emptied smote her to gray-white. She caught open another drawer; that, too, had been partially emptied —and for the moment she forgot that she had told Annie to pack. "To be a peasant, too—to lead a peasant's life—" the words whirled about her as she crouched down on the bed, holding dizzily to the footrail. Then she heard steps flying up the path. Annie's voice called from the porch:

"They're coming, Mrs. Russell, they're coming! They're all right this time!"

Louise had found her guide even more silent than usual when they set off that morning, and it seemed to her that there were lines of sadness in his face. Her Greek god had acquired some touch of modern world-weariness, and with it the modern appeal of pathos. The effervescence that had run over in pink linen and crude impulses to flirtation died down, and she emerged as grave as he, but moved with a new form of recklessness, a dangerous recklessness that believed itself a higher wisdom, and that declared with deceptive calm that youth and beauty and goodness were all that any heart could need, and that for these the world would be well lost. For nearly an hour she let him row in silence, hoping for some word or sign; then she had to speak.

"Why did you say that you don't count?" she asked abruptly.

"Guess it's the truth."

"Why shouldn't you count?"

"Oh, I'm just a rough feller, I know!" His eyes, lifted to hers, frankly confessed his trouble, and her heart went out to him, dizzyingly.

"You are a *man*," she said tremulously, "a strong, brave, beautiful man. Nothing on earth counts like that."

"For cutt'n' down a tree, perhaps. But for making a lady look at you twice—" He broke off with a despondent motion of his head. "I got to live up here, you know. Down in cities I'd be nowhere."

She glanced from right to left, at the sparkling water, the shadowing mountains, and drew a deep breath of clean autumn. Her hands impulsively went out to it.

"Oh, it would be glorious to live up here!" she cried. He stopped rowing to look at her intently.

"Do you really think I got a chance?" he demanded in a low voice. The color swept so burningly across her face that she hastily averted it. She could not answer, for some distressful voice in her was crying out, "No,

no!" like a child in panic. "That ain't quite fair—I ask your pardon," he added quickly. "Only, as you see her every day, I thought she might have said something—she's never give me a word of encouragement."

Louise lifted a strained, startled face. "I—know whom you mean, of course," she faltered.

"Yes'm—Annie." He spoke the name reverently. "I can't believe she'd ever look at me. She's too far above me." And he took sadly to the oars again.

Louise was silent for a long time. Then she raised her head and met his eyes with quiet composure. "I am afraid Annie would not be very happy up here," she assented gently. For the first time in her life there was a suggestion of her mother in her face and voice. "I am so sorry. Now I think we must go back."

He met the verdict with one long, violent sweep of the oars, careless, for once in his woodsman's life, of where he was. Nature seized the chance. The boat leaped ahead, then stopped with shocking suddenness and a

splintering that meant trouble. A knife of rock had gashed open the side below the water line.

"Sit still," said Anderson quietly. One glance placed the shore and his course to it, and then the boat seemed to rise as though for flight at the plunge of the oars. "Lift your feet and that shawl," he added a moment later as a bright stream gushed down the flooring. Except to obey, Louise did not move or speak. The boat already had a wounded drag, but the shore was near, and he flung it forward till it could drop harmlessly on the strip of sand that edged the pines. He was over the side in an instant, dragging it up higher, and helping Louise to walk the seats to safety.

"You did splendidly. I am not even wet," she assured him, as calmly as her mother might have spoken.

"To think of me running on that rock!" he muttered in deep disgust. "Known it for twenty years. Me!"

He tipped out the water and pulled the boat up to examine the break, then laid it down with sober finality and faced the question of

getting home. They were far down the lake on the wrong side, five or six miles of difficult scrambling between them and the nearest boat. The trip would be very hard for a lady; but if she was not afraid of being left, he could do it in an hour or two and come back for her. She assented passively to the arrangement, and huddled down in the sunlight on the little strip of beach with the shawl wrapped about her, longing only to be alone. When the sounds of his quick stride had died away, she dropped her face into her arms and sat so still that the little creatures of the woods ceased to take any account of her.

Shame burned her like a corrosive acid. So she could not have had him if she would —this ignorant laborer to whom she had dreamed of condescending! It was Annie, her mother's servant, who had won him; Annie— empty little piece of tart prettiness that she was —whom he had thought too far above him, and who would have entirely concurred in the opinion. Ah, after all, he was common, common! And she had dreamed of—she crouched

and clenched her hands and cried out brokenly against the thought. "I wouldn't really have done it—oh, I wouldn't!" she wailed to her own self-respect, and gradually some soothing knowledge that this was true stole over her, relaxing her tense muscles and cooling her hot face. "No, it was only play. I never could have, really," she assented at last, with a long breath of reassurance. The pain grew easier after that, and presently a creeping sense of relief, of freedom and escape, made itself known. She was ashamed of it at first, for she had called that heady effervescence love, and was mortified to find it a mere vanishing froth; but the relief grew and spread until it could no longer be ignored. Life was not over for her; a new stirring in her pulses suggested that it might be just beginning. Louise was coming at last to understand herself and the world about her; the universal song of youth sounded the quick notes of its prelude.

Mrs. Russell was lying down in her darkened room when her daughter came in, and heard her explanation in silence.

"Your head must be awful," the girl murmured with timid compassion. "I hope you weren't worried about me?"

"A little," she answered gently.

Half an hour later she came languidly out to the porch where Louise, restored to flannel and canvas, was watching the western sky with absent, absorbed eyes.

"You know that we are going to-morrow, Louise?" she queried. Her eyes were on her daughter's face in dread of some betrayal, but it was unwontedly serene.

"Yes. I am so glad!" was the reassuringly sincere answer. Then Louise stretched out her arms with fists tightly clenched. "Oh, I do hope there will be some fun this winter!" she cried. There was a new tension in her voice, a new alertness in her whole body. Mrs. Russell sank into a porch chair.

"I think I shall have to have some parties for you," she said, and relief had given her voice a new kindness. "You are developing, Louise: I think you might have a very good time, socially. We must see about some

evening clothes for you as soon as we get back."

The light that had sprung into the girl's face deepened and glowed into a wonderful radiance. Sentence had been commuted—there was something for her, too! Her eyes brimmed with warm tears. Forgetting all the years of constraint, she flung herself down beside her mother, one arm across her knee.

"Oh, mother, let's talk about my clothes!" she cried.

XII

The Viper

MRS. PATTISON was flying through her domain like an energetic guardian angel. At nine she was testing the water for the baby's bath. At nine-three she was in the kitchen, inventing a new dessert from the remnants of two old ones and a stale cake. Five minutes later she was separating two small combatants in the garden and inaugurating a new experiment in penalties for infractions of the peace. On her way upstairs she stopped to telephone to the butcher, yet she arrived at the bath room in time to receive the dripping baby into a toweling apron, designed by herself, and to send faithful old Maria scurrying to the beds.

She was still rubbing as if at a baby-drying competition when her husband's gentle, considerate step was heard on the stairs.

"I'm in the nursery, Charles!" she

called—or, more exactly, shouted; her voice was as vitally energetic as her movements.

The Rev. Mr. Pattison came in, lifting his coat solicitously as he stepped over a small daughter with a train of cars in the doorway, and removed a pile of baby-clothes from a chair, holding them on his knee as he sat down. He had brought a troublesome parish problem to submit to his wife, and his kindly, near-sighted eyes were fixed on her with enormous faith as he set it forth.

"We must not be too hard on the boy, when we know what his father was," he concluded with a sigh when she had passed judgment.

Mrs. Pattison, who was brushing the baby's hair straight up from the back of his neck as he lunged after a box cover, paused to emphasize objection with the brush.

"Indeed, I have more blame for the virtuous, stupid mother who brought him up than for the wicked father who died before he was born," she declared. "I tell you, Charles, there is a lot of nonsense talked about heredity.

Women don't know how to bring up their children, that's all; they don't give whole-souled attention to it, and they haven't sound theories, or the right kind of inventiveness. Why, I'll bet I could take the worst little slum rat you could pick up, and it would turn out just as sweet and good as our own children. Just exactly!" And she slid a little shirt on the baby without interrupting his enjoyment of the box cover.

"I wish I could believe that!" Mr. Pattison spoke with troubled intensity. "I wish I could believe it! It would make for hopefulness as nothing——"

"Very well, then, I'll do it." Her tone was so casual that an outsider would have believed her joking, and wondered at her husband's instant alarm.

"Oh, now, Mary! With five children already——"

She waved all that aside.

"It would be worth trying, you know," she said, her increasing excitement showing only in the accelerated speed with which the

baby was whisked into his clothes. "I'll find a baby boy with the very worst inheritance possible—Josie Colman can help me. And if I don't make a good little citizen of him—here, take Charles a moment. I'm going to call up Josie!"

Mr. Pattison received the baby and absently trotted the clean clothes, dismay written on his wide forehead.

"But, Mary! Do you realize——"

Mrs. Pattison spared a moment to cope with her husband's distress, looking back at him from the doorway with a comprehending smile.

"Won't it be a pretty good deed, Charles, to rescue a child? Aren't you ready for your share of it?"

"Yes, dear, yes! But it is you that I am thinking——"

"Oh, me! Nicest experiment I ever had in my life!" She laughed at herself as she hurried away.

It took several weeks to find a specimen sufficiently unpromising to satisfy Mrs. Pattison. Then, one afternoon, she came home

radiant, to set up a new crib and to air the present baby's outgrown clothing. Her husband found her telling the assembled family about the new little brother who was coming in the morning. Marian, the eldest, who remembered the coming of the last little brother, was inclined to think that there was a mistake somewhere; but the others jumped for joy, and ran to meet their father with the splendid news of his new son. Mrs. Pattison sent them away while she made her explanations.

"Nothing could be better," she assured him, her needle flying triumphantly about some little worn flannels. "He is three weeks old, the child of a sneak thief who is now in the penitentiary for the third time, and of a dissolute servant named Katie Sullivan, who died when he was born. Josie heard about it through a friend of the Howard Grannises. The girl was their cook, and she and the man took away most of the family plate when they cleared out. I'm going to get the story in detail when the Grannises come back; but it's bad enough to satisfy anybody. My dear, he is the

most awful little thing! I can scarcely wait to get my hands on him!"

Mr. Pattison's gentle white forehead showed helpless creases.

"You are sure there is no disease?" he began.

"Why, Charles, he's just a little disease himself—nothing else! But there isn't anything that can hurt the others; the doctor and I have been all over him. Give me five years, and then we shall begin to see where this mighty business of heredity comes in." She glanced at the clock, then sprang up and opened the door. "What child is going to have the cleanest hands for supper?" she called, and smiled the smile of successful generalship at the ensuing scramble. The cleanest hands always sat in the seat of honor, which had arms, and received first service.

For a few weeks it looked as if the experiment in heredity were coming to an abrupt end. Then sun and air, cleanliness, nourishment, and devotion began to blossom in the tiny form. Having finally made up his

mind to gain, the waif gained generously, putting on flesh and color, and even unexpected charms. At six months he was a pretty baby with large, placid gray eyes rimmed with black, and a bubbling laugh. At two years he was so splendid, so loving and lovable, that any one but Mrs. Pattison would have forgotten that he was an experiment in heredity. She loved him dearly, but she loved her experiment as well.

"Not much sign of the jail bird about him yet," she announced to her husband at happy intervals.

For four years little Joseph proved an ascending climax of sweetness and light. He was chivalrous, he was honest, generous, warm to all his world. His very faults showed nobility. When his fifth birthday approached without bringing to light any sign of the ancestral taint, Mrs. Pattison felt that the time had come for action. The rescue of this one child was only the beginning of her task; it was for all the branded waifs in Christendom that she had been working.

Her husband heard her plans with gentle distress.

"But, Mary," he protested, "do we want people to be told that our dear little boy——"

"Yes," was the firm interruption. Mrs. Pattison always knew how sentences were going to end. "Yes; we want people to be told that his father was a sneak thief and his mother was worse—to know all that, and then just to look at him! Why, Charles, that is the very thing that I have done it for!"

"Yes, dear. I understand; and, of course, you are right. Only——"

"That is his debt to the world—to help free it from the false burden of heredity. I shall make him understand it when he is eight years old. Now he is simply an unconscious illustration."

Mrs. Pattison threw a kiss from the window to the unconscious illustration, then sat down before a large pad, and wrote firmly across the first sheet: "The Heredity Bogy." Mr. Pattison hesitated unhappily for a mo-

ment; but she had begun to write, so he tiptoed away without speaking.

The Mothers' Psychology Club was full to the very window ledges. It was not a wholly friendly audience that faced the speaker. More languid mothers were not always in sympathy with Mrs. Pattison and her experiments; but every one always wanted to hear her. There might be murmurs of dissent, but there was never a stir of inattention after her bright-eyed, headlong speech was set loose.

This particular address had been preparing for five years. She told them of her hunt for the most hopeless specimen of human infancy; of the sneak thief, with his black record, and of his accomplice in the theft, who had been found dying in well-earned misery; of the forlorn, sickly waif who had satisfied her worst requirements; of the struggle to keep the child alive, and then of the blossoming heart and soul of this little Joseph, born of the slime, but no more polluted by it than was the sound young oak polluted by the ooze at its root.

"And you can do it, too!" she cried, with a swift glance at her watch. "Suppose each one of you three hundred intelligent women took a waif into your homes—took it bravely and publicly—to fight this bogy of heredity that makes people drop their hands and say, 'What's the use? What's the use?'" She turned slightly toward the door. "I am going to show you right now what's the use!"

The door opened, and old Maria in her best bonnet appeared, leading little Joseph, ruddy and shining with starched whiteness, by the hand. He stared dubiously at the strange faces, all turned his way; then he saw the familiar figure on the platform, and, with a crow of joy, he ran forward, tugged up the two brief steps, and flung both arms about his mother's knees.

No coaching could have produced anything half so perfect. There was a touched gasp in the audience, and then came a burst of clapping. Mrs. Pattison lifted the child to the chair beside her and set him standing on its seat, turning him to the house.

"See how they're clapping, dear," she said to reassure him.

Joseph, seeing the hands go, promptly began to pat his own fat palms together, beaming down at them in his joy at the new game, so sweet and wholesome and unconscious a little figure that laughter and clapping broke out all over again, and several women began to cry. Then they all started to their feet and surged round the platform.

"Ah, if I had not three children already!" sighed one.

"I had five," said Mrs. Pattison.

"But we are not at all well off. We can't be sure what advantages—" began another.

"My husband is a poor clergyman," was the quiet answer.

"But what if it was just luck—this particular angel?" urged a third.

"Try it, and help prove that it was not."

"Oh, I will—I'll take one!" exclaimed an eager voice. "I'll begin looking to-night!"

"So will I!"

"So will I!"

"And I!"

"My husband will be—oh, but I must do it!"

"I'll take two!"

The enthusiasm spread and flamed. They were eager to commit themselves. Mrs. Pattison produced a great sheet of paper, and the signatures went down with a dash. For those who did not know how to go about it, she had lists ready—addresses of foundling homes and maternity hospitals, notes of private cases. Some members went off in their carriages at once to begin on the good work. Everyone had to give Joseph a kiss, hygienically planted on his wide forehead or the soft nape of his little neck. He bore it with his inexhaustible friendliness; then, when it was time to go, put up his hand to lead his mother down from the platform.

"I'm right here; I won't let you fall," he assured her. And one wavering soul exclaimed, with tears in her eyes:

"Oh, Mrs. Pattison, put me down, too!"

There were seventy-four names on the list when the meeting was over. Nineteen wrote that night, between regret and relief, that their husbands utterly refused consent; but the remaining fifty-five showed gratifying courage and activity. Baby carriages were brought down from attics, baby linen was seen bleaching on the barberry bushes. Twenty copies of "The Young Child and Its Care" were ordered by mothers whose own children had come in the pre-germ days, and by single ladies who had been swept into the movement from the outside.

At the end of five weeks there was not an adoptable infant left unclaimed in the city, and a drag-net had been thrown over the distant metropolis, producing a wan and wailing little bunch of human flotsam. The public guardians, accustomed to an unvarying demand for curly hair, blue eyes, and a sober inheritance, let these undesirables go with astonished alacrity; and if the new mother, confronting

her acquisition, felt her heart fail her, Mrs. Pattison was there with an uncompromising photograph showing how much worse Joseph was at three weeks, and a radiantly contrasting likeness of Joseph seven months later. Soon she was making daily rounds like a doctor, to advise, reassure, and congratulate; and the false burden of heredity seemed in a fair way to be lifted from the weary shoulders of mankind.

The newspapers, of course, took up the movement—some humorously, some with genuine enthusiasm. Other local societies begged for addresses on adoptive motherhood. One sweet, summery afternoon, the postman brought a similar request from the great W. M. D. S. itself, a metropolitan association that amalgamated wife, mother, daughter, and sister, and paid its lecturers thirty-five dollars and their expenses.

Mrs. Pattison sat down on the porch to consider the request, her eyes bright with excitement, her spirit untouched by a tremor of warning. Honeysuckle bloomed about her,

and the two smallest boys were playing happily together on the lawn beneath. Little Joseph's abundant sweetness had just come out in a cheerful—

"I'll be the horse if you like, Charlie!" and Mrs. Pattison was resolving to see that Charles took no more than his fair share of the driver's cracking whip, when a caller mounted the steps. For a moment she did not recognize the grave, distinguished-looking gentleman whose mustache had acquired a foreign twist and his bow a foreign emphasis; then she put out her hand with a glad exclamation. She had been wanting to see Mr. Howard Grannis for five years.

"Yes, we are home at last," he said, in answer to her questions. "And, Mrs. Pattison, I have only just discovered that it was you who adopted poor Katie Sullivan's child. I wanted to ask you about it."

Silent in her shining pride, she nodded to the prancing horse on the lawn. Her visitor rose and stood looking down over his folded arms at the sturdy, joyous little figure. The

face he turned back to his hostess was deeply touched.

"Splendid, splendid!" Mr. Grannis evidently meant the word of admiration for her as well. "He will repay you, Mrs. Pattison. His mother was one of the finest, purest, warmest souls I have ever known."

Mrs. Pattison turned white.

"His—mother?" she breathed.

"Yes—Katie Sullivan. She lived with us seven years—my wife brought her up, and I have never known a truer, more generous nature. Too trustful, that was all; and a villain got hold of her." Mr. Grannin's jaw set. "He pretended to marry her—pretended that there were reasons for keeping it from us—ah, we ought to have taken better care of her! The night of the theft, when she found out what he was, she ran away, broken-hearted, poor soul! We could not find her, and then the consulship took us away. Of course, the police and the newspapers insisted that she had gone with the wretch, but we knew better—and a sad little letter telling us the whole tale was mailed to

us just before her death." He openly wiped his eyes. "I knew the child was in good hands, but I didn't know how good," he added.

Joseph's rescuer sat rigidly still, her face turned toward the couple on the lawn. Charles tumbled rather hard at that moment, and the horse came back to put a stubby little arm over his shoulders and make anxious inquiries.

"Ah, he is like Katie," exclaimed Mr. Grannis. "He has inherited his mother's nature. He will be a great joy to you, Mrs. Pattison!"

Her look was not joyful. From a neighboring house came the thin, flat wail of early infancy. A baby carriage was turning in at the gate. The letter from the W. M. D. S. stared up at her from her knee. She drew a painful breath.

"So his mother was a good woman, all the time!" she stammered.

"A dear, good woman," said Mr. Grannis.

Mrs. Pattison stared dazedly on the ruins of her experiment, on the task before her.

Down on the lawn, little Joseph, beaming encouragement, turned a somersault to divert the bruised Charles; and suddenly she laughed.

"The viper!" she cried. "Oh, the viper!"

XIII

The House Beautiful

THE great house stood blank and lifeless in the early darkness. Rain was pouring down the gables, turrets and towers of its massive roof; its red sandstone carvings and gargoyles and balconies and balustrades were spouting fountains, its wide sheets of plate glass were rivers of rain. There was a curious look of stale newness about the place. The mounds of clay left by the builders on either side of the marble steps gleamed yellow under the torrent, but they were worn and rounded, as though this were not the first flood they had encountered, and the boards thrown down as a footpath between steps and sidewalk were black with time. A girl in rain coat and rubber boots crossed them adroitly, evidently familiar with their seesawing tricks, and, letting herself in at the wrought iron and glass

front door, pressed a button just inside. The hall that sprang into light was an odd place in which to be tugging off rubber boots. Its wide tracts of inlaid floor, spreading off into dim drawing-rooms, suggested the hushed steps of decorous service, and the polished doors seemed about to swing back under the hands of liveried coat takers and tea bearers. But not a step or a movement sounded after the front door had closed, and the hall, for all its carved panels and lattices, its gildings and bronze fixtures, was totally empty of movable furnishings.

The girl put her wet things in a closet near the front door, emerging with a pair of worn slippers. Stooping to put these on seemed to suggest to her that she was very tired; she slipped down to the floor, her back against the wall and arms about her knees, staring resentfully at her surroundings. There was something about her that suggested the idealized college girl of sympathetic illustrations, something wholesome and sensible and square-shouldered and, above all, indomitably honest. Truth lay, a definite beauty, on her wide fore-

head, candor looked out of her open glance, reliability and straightforwardness had squared her chin and steadied her gravely generous mouth. It was not at this moment a serene face. She looked troubled, galled by some bruising thought, and her eyes, passing from splendor to splendor, were dark with protest. At last, rousing herself, she put out the lights with an unfriendly thrust and went quickly and surely through big, dark passages till she pushed back the swing door of a lighted kitchen. Its range, designed to give a chef scope, stood cold and rusting, but a gas stove was in full blast, and over it bent a gray-bearded man in an apron, frying sausages with desperate attention and frequent jerks of protesting hands when the hot fat spouted. In spite of his alertness, every line of his handsome face and loose figure marked him easy-going, careless, incorrigibly good-humored.

"Hello, Bertie," he greeted her, without looking up. "Don't come near these durn things; they bite."

"Why do you stay so close?" she

asked seriously, beginning to set a small table. "Just give them an occasional turn."

"Not much. I've burned dinners enough to— Look here!" He beckoned her mysteriously and pointed to a sausage frying furiously in the center of the pan. "See that one?" he whispered. "I'm calling it William F. Gorman."

She turned away with an unwilling laugh that was more than half a protest at his levity. "The paper wants me to interview William F. Gorman's son," she announced dryly. "He's arriving to-day in their private car—to work his way up from the bottom."

Mr. Rix jeered. "Overalls and ten dollars a week—for six weeks. I know! You going to do it?" he added.

"Interview—that man's son!" Her horror made him glance hastily over his shoulder with a soothing:

"Of course not, course not. I was joking. Wouldn't have you for dollars. Only, you know, Bertie," he reminded her presently, as she went on setting the table in silence,

"Gorman hasn't broken any laws except the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule and the Precepts of Mohammed. He couldn't be jailed. If heaven hadn't given you a careless old fool for a father, you'd be lording it in the pink and gold southeast suite this very minute." Mention of the pink and gold suite seemed to restore Berta's good humor.

"Oh, well, there's a good side to everything," she said with an air of cheerful inconsequence. "By the way, we may get a lodger or two to-night. Both the hotels are full, and Mrs. Loftus hasn't a room left. She called me up at the office to ask if——"

A bell clipped her sentence.

"There they come," said her father jovially. "Tell 'em they can have the second pantry man's apartment and the personal maid's lobby." Though it was nearly a year since his disastrous palace had been finished, Mr. Rix was still enjoying the enormous joke of the plans.

The house had been his surprise for Berta when she came out of college; he had

"imported the best men from Chicago and turned 'em loose," as he explained nonchalantly to his daughter while she still sat in the carriage outside, too dazed to move. "Surprise of your life, h'h?" he had burst out, giving her a happy hug. And, indeed, it was. Berta, fresh from four years of classical study and a summer of mellow Europe, had followed from room to room of florid gorgeousness in growing, dumb panic, and then, on their return to the vast, scarlet-walled drawing-room, had crumpled down against his shoulder in an anguish of tears, as difficult and shamed as a boy's, but wrenched out of her very soul by the pathos of the monstrous thing. But, before he could suspect their meaning, she had taken her part, flung away her splendid birthright of truthfulness and committed herself, heart and soul, to a pitying lie.

"It's magnificent!" she gasped. Berta's lightest word was as another's oath, and her father was hilarious at his success.

"Like it, do you?" he chuckled.

"Like it!" Berta lied up and down,

back and forth, lied wincing in every fiber, scorched with shame and repugnance, hating the great incubus for this as she could never have hated it for its own sins, yet lying as steadily as though she had had weeks in which to choose her course instead of that one moment of heart-breaking perception.

"It's great, stunning, beautiful," she cried over and over. "And you did all this for me!"

"Oil did it all for you," was the jubilant answer. "Gorman and I have got a great thing between us, Bertie. This House Beautiful is just the beginning of it. You wait!"

The servants' quarters had been furnished, but the rest was waiting for Berta's hand, and the two had gone back to Chicago a day or two later, prepared with monster lists, over which they wrangled, with tremendous laughter, all the way. Berta did not do things by halves; her one great lie was as uncompromising as all her life's honesty had been. She spoke of the house as one speaks of a triumph, and let him plan their future life in it without

one outward shudder, though the florid façade loomed before her like a jail. The memory of the trip ended in darkness. From the crash till the sudden peace of the cool, clean hospital, Berta knew only the confused horror of bad dreams. Then had followed the months of her father's slow healing, while the very word business was forbidden, and William F. Gorman, his associate, was busy after the manner of his kind. Mr. Rix at last came feebly home, without furniture, and also, strangely enough, without bitterness.

"Own fault," he said philosophically. "I ought to have done my rights up in barbed wire—I knew Gorman well enough. Well, we've got the house yet, and perhaps some sucker will buy it before they foreclose." He had paused on the sidewalk in front, his weight resting on his daughter's arm. "Grand, isn't it!" he said confidentially.

"Great!" said Berta.

"Pretty low, to do you out of that!" he muttered. It was the nearest that he ever came to a complaint.

The bell had time to ring again before Berta could set down her dishes, take off her apron and make her way through the long passages to the front door. It opened on a big, rain-coated figure whose question died in his throat as his glance passed Berta to her splendid background.

"Oh, I'm sorry—I've made a mistake." In spite of his commanding size, he blushed awkwardly. "A Mrs. Loftus directed me——"

"Did you want lodging?" Berta threw back the door. "We furnish rooms, but not meals. Come in, please," she added, as he still seemed inclined to stay out in the downpour. He obeyed with a start, dropping his soaked umbrella across the threshold and clutching for it with a sigh of despair.

"If anything can be dropped, I drop it," he stammered. "I hope it hasn't—hurt your floor."

As he straightened up, Berta realized with satisfaction that at last here was some one big enough for the hall; he made a visible im-

pression on its overpowering spaciousness. The shy boyishness of his big face made her smile as she took the umbrella away from him and set it in the coat closet.

"We generally use the side door, but the path is under water just now," she said reassuringly. "You wanted a room?"

His worried glance had paused at the bronze Ceres on the stairpost with her clusters of luminous grapes.

"I want to *hire* a room," he explained with difficulty. "I know you're awfully hospitable out here and all that, but—I've come as a workman, and I——"

"Three dollars a week is our usual rate," she interrupted composedly. "If you want a sitting room that will be two dollars more. I will show you what we have if you will come to the back stairs. We don't use this part of the house."

She pressed buttons as they went, sending the light darting ahead of them, lighting up rich woods crowded with carving, decorated walls, painted ceilings, grilled arches, wrought

door knobs; there did not seem to be a foot of space unadorned. She could feel the groping astonishment of the young giant at her back, but it did not amuse her. The house was too sore a subject for any aspect of it to make her smile.

"You have a—a handsome house," he ventured as they mounted what she had called the back stairs, though the homely title was ludicrously inappropriate.

"It is a very beautiful house." Berta spoke with a note of authority, almost of defiance.

"Stunner," he assented with a hasty enthusiasm that made her warm to him. "You must be—it must be awful—" he broke down, flushing at his impulsive intrusion. "I'm very glad you had a room for me," he finished lamely.

She opened the door of the room marked "Butler's Suite" on the plans. It had three windows, a bath and a big closet, and the lodger looked about him with open satisfaction as he set down his bag.

"This is great," he exclaimed. "Of course you want references. My name is Gorman, and——"

All the friendly liking was stricken out of Berta's face.

"Are you related to William F. Gorman?" she asked sharply.

"Why, yes. He is my father." He had only honest surprise for her hostility.

"My father is Albert Rix," she said, and looked to see him wince.

"Albert Rix," he repeated slowly. "I know the name, but—my father never talks much, Miss Rix, and I've been at college. Did they have a row?"

He was so frankly puzzled, so unsuspecting of his father's part, that the hot words would not be said.

"You'd better ask him about it," she muttered, turning away. In the pause that followed, the rain, coming in mighty dashes against the windows, seemed to threaten the glass.

"You mean that your father wouldn't

want me staying here?" He could not quite grasp anything so incredible.

"Oh, he wouldn't mind—he doesn't mind anything!" impatiently. "It's only I——"

He picked up his bag again. "I'm so sorry," he said, and waited for her to lead the way out. For all her righteous anger, she found that she could not; and blamed the weather.

"You can't go room hunting in this rain," she said severely. "You will have to stay, now that you are here."

He still hesitated, looking at her with troubled eyes that were as honest as her own.

"I think I'd better see your father," he said. Berta left him without a word.

Dinner waited a long time while Mr. Rix and the lodger talked upstairs. At last Berta heard steps in the passage, and her father's genial voice.

"Well, I was down, and I got put out;" he was evidently repeating himself. "When you go into business, you take the

chance of getting business treatment, and I've never blamed anyone but myself. It's natural that my daughter should feel rather hot," he added confidentially. "You can see what a home like this would mean to a girl!"

"I should say so!" was the heavy response.

"Well, it's all right," urged Mr. Rix. "Here's a key for you. Sure you wouldn't rather have a sausage here than swim for it? Want to be called in the morning or anything? Well, good night. Let me know if you want anything; if I'm not in the kitchen, you'll find me in the servants' dining room!" he ended with his unfailing laugh. "That's a first-rate young fellow, Berta," he announced from the doorway. "He plays chess, too."

"Oh, do come to dinner," said Berta desperately.

The lodger stayed, but evidently not very comfortably. If he met Berta in the halls, he flushed, and generally contrived to drop something. Mr. Rix persistently dragged him downstairs, evenings, for long, silent games of

chess, while Berta, equally silent, sat near them with book or mending or with her tired head dropped back and her eyes closed. She spoke to the lodger with passive courtesy when he came and went and, in between, there was not a flicker of a sign that the two were even remotely conscious of each other. Yet, if Mr. Rix left the room, the silence lost its ease, became rigid, momentous. The third time that this happened, Gorman turned to the averted figure with an abruptness that set the chessmen rolling.

"I don't know what to do about this chess, Miss Rix." He had flushed, but his voice was courageous. "Your father seems to want it so much; and yet for me to intrude on you like this—well, I can see how it must look to you!"

She did not lift her head from her book. "Your playing with him is a great kindness," she said coldly. "My father isn't well enough to work yet, and chess is the only game he cares for. I am very glad to have you come."

He sighed. "I'm afraid you don't

mean that," he said. Her eyes flashed round at him.

"I don't lie," she said shortly; and then, before his startled apology could find words, her color rose and rose till her very forehead was flooded. "Except on one subject," she muttered. The blush and the unwilling admission put him more at his ease. She looked very young and girlish in that moment of distress.

"Of course," he said heartily. "I didn't mean it that way. I have tried every day to find another room," he presently went on, rearranging the chessmen, "but, between the oil boom and the weather, every corner of the town is full. I have hated to have you think that I was—simply disregarding your feelings. Mrs. Loftus may be able to put me up after to-morrow."

There was a question under the statement, and, after a moment's struggle, Berta acknowledged it.

"If you are comfortable here, I hope you will stay." The words were not cordial,

but they were unmistakably honest, and he looked relieved.

"Thank you, then I will—at least, until my father gets back."

At the mention of his father she returned pointedly to her book. When Mr. Rix reappeared, the mislaid pipe in his hand, the two were apparently as unaware of each other's existence as they had been when he left.

Young Gorman was evidently not afraid of work. Berta, collecting "oil notes" for her paper, saw him day after day, mud splashed and rubber booted, in the thick of the tumult, directing gangs of laborers or throwing his own great bulk against a difficulty with the trained ease of a famous center rush. The contrast as he stood talking down to a gnarled little Italian foreman often made her laugh to herself. She was more at peace with life, more friendly to man—even man bearing the name of Gorman—when she was out from under her own overpowering roof. He, too, seemed freer in the open. His face turned rather grave at sight of her, but he neither flushed nor stum-

bled as he returned her slight greeting. She punctiliously sought all her information from others until one day he took hold of the situation with unexpected force.

He had come on her struggling across the rough ground in a driving rain, trying with both hands to hold her umbrella against the wind, and the sight seemed to bring some hidden protest to a sudden climax of anger. He took the umbrella from her with one hand and with the other turned her forcibly to the shelter of an empty shed.

"Why on earth will you martyrize yourself?" he burst out, giving the umbrella a wrathful shake. She was too breathless and surprised to answer. "You know perfectly well that you could get every bit of news you want any evening, without leaving your chair," he scolded on; "but your confounded pride, and your desire to rub it in—what's the sense of punishing *me?*"

The flushed, rain-wet face betrayed a momentary confusion. Berta had not been sorry that Gorman's son should see how hard

Albert Rix's daughter had to work, but she had not expected him to recognize this. She hastily collected her defenses.

"I see no reason that you should do my work," she began.

He was too intent on what he had to say to heed that.

"I know how you feel, of course," he went on. "Every time I go into that—that magnificent home of yours I can tell you it wrings me. Not that I judge my father! I'm with him, you know. Even if I might not act just the same myself, I'm on his side—I stand by him through everything. I might fight him privately, but I'd fight for him outside, just as you would for yours. It's natural that you should hate us, but—you know—I think you ought to be big enough not to. You, even with all you've lost right there before you!"

Berta had always seen him in the apologetic attitude before, and the unexpected reproof stung.

"It isn't for myself," she said hotly. "It's for him! If your father were trustful

and careless and warm to everybody and—and pathetic, some way, and some cool, clever man stabbed him in the back when he was down—oh, could you get over it?" Tears rushed into her eyes. "Wouldn't you have to be angry for him?"

He paled under the attack. "Perhaps, for a while," he admitted slowly. "But I should want to be very sure I hadn't misjudged the—cool, clever man. You've never heard the other side, have you?"

"I don't feel as if words could make any difference. I don't want to be—small; but there is the fact. Of course, I know it doesn't involve you," she added honestly. "I will try to remember that." She held out her hand, and he took it in both his.

"Will you let me bring you your oil news?" he asked, as though that were the test of her sincerity. She drew her hand away with a faint smile.

"On wet days," she conceded.

He hailed a passing buggy. "Jim, take Miss Rix over to the car," he commanded.

Berta had not got what she came for, but she went in astonished docility.

The side path was an impassable slough, and she let herself into the great house by the front door, tugging off her rubber boots under the luminous grape clusters of the bronze Ceres on the stairpost. Her bearing had a new cheerfulness to-night, and she even greeted Ceres with a tolerant, "Hello, old girl," as the lights sprang up. To be wroth with even a chance acquaintance is a sorry state, and Gorman's forcible burying of the hatchet had made her ashamed of her bitterness. He had been quite right to call her small: she liked his doing it, and the memory of his anger was oddly stirring. She wasted no time glowering at her surroundings to-night.

The kitchen was still unlighted, and her father sat by the window, a dim outline, yet so expressive of patient discouragement that her new spirits went down before a sudden stab of pain.

"Tired?" she asked, her hand on his shoulder.

"Just a little." He could not quite manage his usual cheerfulness, and she saw the white glimmer of a letter in his hand.

"Bad news?" she asked quickly, taking it from him.

"Well, I don't care for it myself," with feeble whimsicality. "There's a man who says I owe him some money—and I guess I do. Anyway, he's said it often enough to make it true, even if it wasn't. Now he says he's coming to take the furniture out from under us in the morning. Nice fellow, isn't he? Such a joker." Berta dropped down on the nearest chair in blank dismay. Her father hurried on: "Don't you think we'd be happier in rooms, anyway, Bertie? It's kind of foolish, living in the coal bin of a palace, like this. Suppose he takes the chairs and the tables and we get out?"

"But rooms cost," she protested. "We can't afford them."

"Oh, I'll be at work again pretty soon." He felt his head with inquiring fingers, as though to see what it would stand. "And,

anyway, we'll have to move in eight weeks, dear child."

"They'll foreclose?"

"That's what."

A sense of sinking helplessness, of utter panic, clutched at her throat and side. Then she rose up, her sturdy, practical self again, and turned on the lights.

"We might as well have dinner," she announced. Her father caught at her tone with an eager gratitude that nearly broke her down.

"Eat, drink and be merry, for to-morrow we'll be sold up," he cheered her on. "Don't leave anything in the refrigerator or they'll attach that. Here's Gorman," he added as the door opened.

"I just brought you a few items for your paper, Miss Rix." The lodger was holding out a typewritten sheet with shy determination. "You know, you said I might."

She took it mechanically. "Thank you," she said. "Father, oughtn't we to tell Mr. Gorman that we are—moving?"

"Moving?" The young man looked dismayed.

"Fact, Gorman. It's very sudden, but it looks as if we should—oh, take to furnished rooms or something."

"I suppose you would be more comfortable," he assented after an unhappy pause. "How soon?"

"Well, to-morrow, I'm afraid."

"But have you found a place? You know the town is jammed."

"That's so; but we'll get something. Awfully sorry about you, though. Perhaps Mrs. Loftus——"

"Oh, I'm all right." He looked uneasily from one to the other; but Mr. Rix was filling the kettle with an air of cheerful industry, and Berta's head was bent down over the apples she was coring. Something in the atmosphere said, "Don't stay," and he reluctantly obeyed. He got no farther than the stairs, however; halfway up he paused, pondering, with troubled eyes. Voices sounded cheerfully from the kitchen. He heard Berta's

laugh and her father's answering chuckle, and the sounds of brisk movements, then a clear, "In five minutes!" as the door swung open. Berta did not see him, and he stood transfixed at the sudden change that came over her when the door had shut. Her face dropped into her hands and she made blindly for the stairs, but sank down on the bottom step, crushing back all sound of the sobs that shook and wrenched her. At his gasp of distress, she crouched closer to the stairs, as though to hide.

"My dear girl!" He was nearly crying himself as he knelt beside her. "What is it? Don't mind me—let me help. I knew there must be something. You *poor* child!" She made no attempt to answer, but presently her fingers found a letter in her belt and held it out to him. He read it with muttered sounds that rose to an explosive climax of wrath, heaving him to his feet with its force.

"Don't give it another thought," he burst out. "He's not coming near you. I'll see him!" He would have rushed off on the instant, but her broken voice stopped him.

"You're not going to pay him! I couldn't bear that!"

"Pay him? I'm going to *kick* him!"

"But—we do owe him the money, you know."

"Yes; and he owes us exactly seven times that amount, and has had all the consideration and time and—oh, this makes me swear! You won't hear from him again till you're ready to, I can promise you that."

"If he'll only wait eight weeks." She lifted her tear-stained face in her relief. "Then they'll foreclose on the house, and he can have the furniture as well as not. And if some one should buy it first, we can pay him. So, you see, it's all right," she ended with an eager reassurance that made his big hands clench in impotent pity. "Oh, I do thank you, Mr. Gorman!"

"Don't, don't," he muttered, turning away. "I'll explain to your father," he added, without looking back.

The weeks that followed were a surprisingly cheerful time, in spite of impending

homelessness and incessant storm. Never had the rainy season earned its title so thoroughly; but, after forty days, the slow-breaking clouds of sunset revealed the gold bar of heaven and left hope of dry land once more. A better hope came with the clearing. When Berta let herself in, late and tired but inexplicably buoyant, her father, who had evidently been listening for her, met her wildly in the hall, blue-aproned, a knife in one hand and an orange in the other. His kindly, careless, handsome face was burning with excitement, deeply moved with joy and relief.

"We're saved, Bertie," he cried. "The wind's tempered this time. There's some one after the house—and you needn't work any more, my little girl!" Tears ran down his face, and knife and orange met recklessly as he flung his arms about her.

"To buy it?" she gasped.

"To buy it—cash down and no questions. I'm sorry, dear, for it was your home, but, oh, glory, I'm glad!"

"O father!" The heavy care was

leaving her heart, the lie was rolling off her soul.

"We won't get what it cost, of course," he explained, wiping his eyes. "But there'll be enough over the mortgage to give us an income for all our days. I don't see what we're sniveling about," he ended with a catch in his breath.

"Oh, I see," she returned with a sob. He stood with his arms round her, looking proudly, yet sadly, at the splendors about them.

"If you could only have lived in it properly just once," he sighed. "It's a pretty fine house, if I do say it!"

The lie was so nearly over for her now that she gave it with her whole heart.

"It's the most beautiful house in the world," she cried, then flushed as she saw the front door opening. Mr. Rix suddenly recovered his spirits.

"Hello, Gorman! We've got some one after the house," he shouted. The big lodger smiled uncertainly, his glance resting on Berta's tear-touched eyes.

"Well, of course, it must be a relief,

too," he offered her comfortingly. "Who is buying it?" he added, turning to the coat closet.

"Some oil nabob, I suppose; he doesn't appear in the transaction. He sent an agent. It's a load off, Gorman, I can tell you! Isn't there some show in town? We must all go to the theater. Oh, my Lord, those chops!" And he fled.

Gorman turned quickly to Berta. "You're happy, aren't you?" he asked, earnest eyes on her face. "The relief is greater than the loss, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes, yes—I'm happy right down through!" she cried. "If you only knew——!"

"I can guess, a little." He looked deeply, warmly happy himself. "Well, then, I'm going to ask you something."

She bent down to tie her slipper. "It's a good night to ask me things," she said.

"Will you forgive my father?" She looked up, too surprised to answer. "Couldn't you accept him—forget all your bitterness and be friendly with him? You see, I'm not trying

to excuse him—though he doesn't feel himself in the wrong. I'm just begging, that's all, because I—it means everything in the world to me. Could you?"

He held out his two hands as though they were his father's. She waited a moment, to be sure, then gave him both her own.

"Yes; I'll be friends with—your father," she promised, and, looking up into his eyes, forgot to look away again. Ceres was kind; the electric light faltered, then went out, leaving them for a moment in total darkness. When the purple grapes bloomed again, they shone on a new heaven and a new earth.

The chops were burned to a crisp, so they went down to a hotel for dinner, Berta and the lodger suddenly very shy and silent. When dessert was served, Mr. Rix, a sympathetic twinkle in his eyes, left them together while he went after theater tickets. Gorman, meeting Berta's glance, suddenly laughed.

"It's no use. I can't keep it," he exclaimed. "Berta, who do you think is going to live in your grand home?"

"Your father?" in startled suspicion.

"No. Young married couple." His smile was so significant, so embracing, that her face flamed.

"Tell me," she commanded hastily.

"You are!"

"What?" She recoiled from him, but he saw only her bewilderment.

"You see, I wrote my father—how it was with me; and how you were situated. And he told me to go ahead and buy the house as a—wedding present from myself to—any lady who would have me. We can't keep it up just as it should be, at first, but we'll do very well, and you will be in your own pink and gold rooms—my dear love!" he ended, with all his heart in his voice.

"Oh!" After the faint, frightened gasp, she said nothing at all, but sat so motionless, her white face bent on her hand, that he was troubled.

"I've upset you. I'm a clumsy brute—I always upset everything," he muttered. "It wasn't anything to do, Berta—don't take it so

to heart. We'll forget all about it now. Dear, here comes your father!"

She roused herself with a strained smile, and Gorman kept Mr. Rix's attention engaged until they were in their musty little velvet seats and the curtain was going up on "The Old Homestead." The play was, as Mr. Rix jovially explained, "sort of appropriate," but during those three hours Berta neither saw nor heard. She was facing the consequences of her one kindly lie. A big thing had been done to give her happiness: thousands of dollars were to be taken out of this simple, honest man's heritage to restore to her a beloved home. Could she throw the gift back, let him see that she had made a fool of him? Not that she had made a fool of her father: "I couldn't have done diffently, I couldn't!" she cried before the piteous memory of his happiness over the surprise. But with this younger man it was different. She could not enter on her life with him except in the clear beauty of absolute truth, she could not for one half hour feign joy in that monstrous possession. And yet the alternative seemed

equally impossible. To so wound a generous soul, to make him understand the ugly, lying part she had played!

"If only I needn't tell him now!" was her silent wail when at last the curtain fell on the play and they rose in their seats. The knowledge that it must be now lay like a dead weight on her heart.

Yet it was not to be that night. As they stepped out on the sidewalk, Mr. Rix turned to her with an apologetic smile and tried to say something. A moment later he lay unconscious at their feet.

For forty-eight hours Berta scarcely knew day from night. She could have lost her father after his accident with only the normal sorrow common to all daughters of kindly, loving men; but in this year of caring for him, working for him, lying for him, her love had sunk to a depth that was half motherhood. She could not let him go. When the nurse counseled rest and fresh air, Berta simply looked at her as if she spoke an unknown tongue and turned back to the bed. She would lie down

only when Gorman took her place. He was a rock of strength to her, and those two long nights brought them together in a closeness that no happy experience could have wrought; but she gave him no separate thoughts, and the look in her eyes haunted him.

Mr. Rix rallied as suddenly as he had gone down. By the fourth night he was out of danger, and Berta was rounding out twelve hours of unbroken sleep. He smiled with feeble whimsicality as Gorman came to relieve the nurse.

"I almost ended my days in the House Beautiful, after all," he said, and sighed faintly. Then a worried frown crossed his forehead. "By the way, we haven't lost that sale, have we?"

"No; and you won't lose it," Gorman promised. The heartiness of his reassurance made the older man look at him with awakening keenness.

"See here, Gorman, who's buying it?" he asked suddenly.

"You ought not to talk, Mr. Rix."

"I don't want to talk—I want you to. Who's going to live in this house, young man?"

Gorman took the aged hand in his big, young grasp. "Berta and you and I," he said.

Relief dawned in the worn face, grew to heavenly peace.

"She'll have her own beautiful home—my little girl!" he murmured. He became drowsy after that, but presently started awake. "You're a good fellow, Gorman. I'm glad it's you."

"Well, I'm glad it's me," said Gorman with a mighty sigh.

When Berta came hurrying down at midnight, self-reproachful for her long oblivion, she found her father sound asleep, and Gorman yielding up his place to the nurse. He followed Berta to the kitchen, where a kettle bubbled hospitably on the glowing range.

"I have told your father," he began joyfully. Berta, who was investigating the refrigerator with sudden appetite, slowly closed

its door and rose to face him. She realized with sickening certainty that the time had come. "You never saw anything so wonderful as his face," Gorman was going on. "The fact that you were to live always in your splendid home —that meant more to him than our marriage, Berta. At first, anyway. How he did love doing it for you!"

"Don't. I've got to tell you something." Her strained voice sounded harsh, almost angry. "I told you long ago that on one subject I lied—always. Well, I can't lie to you. It has got to be straight between us. I hate this house!"

"Berta!"

"I loathe this house. I consider it a horror," she rushed on. "There isn't an inch of it that doesn't break every law of beauty and taste and—oh, it is vulgar and unspeakable! But the poor darling didn't know, and it was his surprise for me, so I lied—and lied—and—and—now I'm punished, for I have to put a knife into you, hurt you horribly. Oh, I love you, but I can't live all my life in this house!"

"Berta!" He swept her up into his arms. "You poor child! Listen, listen—I've lied, too! For I thought the house was—just what you say—pretty bad, dear! But I tried to like it, because I did so awfully like you—oh, I'd have liked a pink silk Chinese pagoda, if you did! But, just the same, it's perfectly bully to find you didn't! I might have guessed. What is it?" he added, for, after a moment of shining joy, her face had clouded, and she drew away from him.

"He will be so disappointed," she faltered. "If he hadn't been told—but now he'll be so disappointed!" Gorman nodded in sobering recognition of the fact.

"So he will," he assented. They faced it sadly for a long minute; then she drew the deep breath of resolution.

"So long as you knew—so long as there was no lie between us—" she began. He caught her meaning, and responded with generous eagerness.

"Why not, for the rest of his life! Couldn't you be happy here—if we got together

in corners and called it names whenever we liked?"

She ran back into his arms. "Oh, we can be happy anywhere. Let's make him happy too!" she cried.

XIV

The Modern Way

At the nursery door her brother stopped her with a hand on her shoulder and a laugh in his big voice.

"Cordy, I tell you right here, I'm skeptical about the kids," he declared. "This bringing them up with no punishments—well, it wouldn't have worked with us, you know!"

"Ah, but they have consequences," Cordelia broke in eagerly. "Every bad act brings its inevitable consequence—you will see—just as it does in life. Isn't that better than frowns and blows from me? Isn't it infinitely wiser?"

"We break the colts by kindness—but we take the whip along." He spoke dubiously. "Well, if I think they need a whack or two, I shall say so, that's all. You did in your day, let me remark!"

"Ah, poor mother didn't know," she murmured, and threw back the door. "Here is *dear* Uncle Henry come to see Helena and Robert!" The earnestness of her inflections raised the announcement almost to the plane of prayer. "Now *what* do you say to Uncle Henry, darling?"

"How do you do?" The small, flat, monotonous drawl offered an amusing contrast. The big uncle, suppressing a laugh, looked down into a small, pale, inscrutable face. For a bare instant the eyes were raised to his, but the glance was curiously blank, and fell away unresponsively before his smile. Released, Helena returned at once to her little table and her water colors, paying no further attention to the new relative. Big Robert, aged fourteen months, was a simpler matter; a poke or two established their relations at once.

"And *now*—we're going down to lunch with Uncle Henry!" Cordelia went on with an air of elated climax that should have aroused a childish heart to jumpings.

"Mother, I am not hungry. I should

like to stay and finish my picture." The toneless little voice neither pleaded nor protested; it merely stated.

"No, dear. Mother will explain just why to you by and by. I want you to come now and eat your lunch. Maybe there's something you like!" with a clap of enthusiastic palms. Helena's fathomless glance touched her mother's face unresponsively, then dropped; but she rose at once and preceded them to the dining room.

"Soft mouth," Henry admitted. "That's pretty sharp minding. If she always comes up to the reins like that——"

"But isn't it a daily experience that people will do for love and reason what they won't for force?" Cordelia broke in. "Helena, at seven, is a perfectly reasonable being, because she has been led, shown the way, not driven. And it is a strange thing, Henry"—she paused, lowering her voice—"she is handing down to the baby this same guiding of love and reason that I have given her. She is the most wonderful little mother! And Robert

minds her twice as well as he does me. It's almost hypnotic, the way the little thing can control and direct him. And they don't know the word s-l-a-p!"

"Well, you're a wonder," Henry conceded, but provisionally.

There was certainly truth in the claim that Helena had a strong influence over her baby brother. Early in the meal Robert, from his high chair, became so enamored of a cut-glass dish that life without it grew suddenly insupportable. He squirmed, scolded, stormed, and his mother's insistent "Hurt baby!" illustrated by touches of the sharp edge on his fat hand, wholly failed to appease his desire. Baby preferred consequences to denial. Suddenly Helena, who had been eating diligently, with bent head, turned to him, lifting a small forefinger.

"Robert! Mustn't!" she said quietly. The baby, meeting her still, pale gaze, stared for a moment as though fascinated, then muttered, bubbled, sighed, and went back to the tame joys of a napkin ring. Helena returned to

her chicken. It was odd that, a few minutes after this exhibition of maturity, she should childishly, even wantonly, tip over a glass of milk, chiefly into her lap.

"My darling girl! That was careless!" Her mother's voice was all love and distress. "See—your clean gown is drenched. Now what will be the consequences of such carelessness?"

"Leave the table," murmured Helena dispassionately.

"I'm afraid so, love. Mother is so sorry! Get all dry, won't you, dear?" Helena slipped soberly out of the room, but they could hear her light feet scampering on the stairs.

"You see?" Cordelia turned triumphantly to her brother. "There is no anger, no punishment—just inevitable consequences."

"We'd have got it pretty warm for that," he admitted thoughtfully.

"Yes; anger, reproaches, slapped hands, resentment! And we should have left the table disgraced. She's got the gist of the

experience, the necessary part. Now isn't the modern way better? She won't do it again." Henry's thoughtfulness had increased.

"She didn't want to come to lunch," he said suddenly.

"No. She is so absorbed in her paints, she doesn't want to do anything else," was the indulgent answer.

"H'm," murmured Henry. "I don't believe she will do it again," he added presently. "Interesting child—very!"

It had rained that morning, and in the afternoon Helena stated a preference for the nursery over the wet garden; but, after submitting to an earnest talk on hygiene and the need of fresh air, she went readily forth with Robert and the nurse. It was the nurse who sent her back, ten minutes later, because of leaking rubbers.

"But where are your new ones, darling?" urged her mother. They spent twenty minutes in the search, but finally had to give up hygiene for that day. Not till the next morning, when a little playmate called to beg that

Helena might "come over," did they reappear —down behind the nursery woodbox.

"It is very queer how they got there," wondered Cordelia.

"I think Robert was playing with them yesterday," said little Helena. "I *think* so—I am not sure," she added carefully.

"You were a clever little daughter to find them," said her mother fondly.

"May I stay to lunch if Gladys's mother asks me?"

"No, darling. You haven't been very well, and mother likes to know just what you eat. Come home at twelve, won't you?"

"Yes, mother." The toneless answer betrayed no disappointment. Cordelia went to the window to smile after the two little figures.

"I sometimes fear that Helena is almost too docile," she said. "When I remember how we fussed—! You don't think she is weak, do you, Henry?"

"*Weak!* My dear Cordy, she's steel —granite—we're paper beside that child! Weak!" It was almost a shout, and he re-

peated it on a still higher key. "She's got the bit in her teeth from the moment she wakes up in the morning—she's going to have her own way if the sky falls! Weak—my Lord!"

"Oh, Henry, you are too absurd." Cordelia was amused. "You ought to marry and learn something about children. Robert's a little rebel, if you like, but Helena—really and truly, she's almost too good. The way she will take care of Robert, for instance—I can leave them all alone together for hours. You ought to hear what other mothers say to me about her."

"She isn't weak," was the dogged answer. "Don't you worry about that!"

Henry happened to be present, a couple of hours later, when his sister was summoned to the telephone. The broken conversation set him smiling deeply behind his newspaper.

"Why, that is too bad! Helena hasn't been very well lately, and I told her . . . Oh, of course, sponge cake is very simple . . . Well, if the cook has gone to all that trouble, I suppose . . . You are very good, Mrs.

White, to want her. Yes, she can stay. But just give her simple things, won't you? . . . Why, the dear little soul! Tell her it is all right—mother is willing that she should stay. . . . Oh, I am sure of that. You are very good. Good-by!

"Henry, isn't it annoying! The cook had understood from the children that Helena was to stay to lunch, and had made little special —what are you smiling at?"

Henry erased his expression with a thoughtful palm. "Paper's rather amusing to-day," he said, rising. "So Helena is going to stay to lunch after all!"

"Well, after the cook had taken all that trouble—their names on the cakes and all that—and Gladys was weeping— Sponge-cake is harmless enough. But I would so much rather have her home! Mrs. White is not modern about diet and hygiene."

"I wonder how the cook came to make the mistake?" mused Henry.

He was watching for his niece when she came home that afternoon, and followed

her to the nursery. He found her embracing Robert with the fervor of reunion, fussily maternal, but obviously sincere. Henry took a chair facing the group.

"You are fond of your brother, aren't you, Helena?" he began. Her brief, veiled glance met his only for an instant, but she answered with childish simplicity.

"Oh, yes. I love him better than anything. I've never wanted my dolls since I had him."

"She's real wonderful with him," put in the nurse admiringly. "He don't mind no one else. It ain't easy," she added confidentially, "this bringing 'em up without no—well, you know what, sir!"

Henry nodded understandingly. "Helena, come here," he said, as the nurse left the room with Robert's empty bowl and cup. She obeyed at once, but so reluctantly that he felt half ashamed of the superior strength that coerced her as he lifted her to his knee. "You are a very clever little girl," he said, looking keenly into the small, pale face. "Cleverer

perhaps than even your mother knows—aren't you?" The downcast face remained obstinately blank. "It's hard to be a little, weak girl, and yet want your own way so awfully, isn't it?" he went on with confidential sympathy. "I always wanted my own way just as hard as you do, but I was big and strong and I could fight for it. But I know exactly how you feel, Helena. So I hope we're going to be friends, you and I." There was not a gleam of response. She might have been the dullest little girl in Christendom; and the disturbing thought that perhaps she really was, and that he had been misreading her, checked his speech. He was still faltering before the idea when Cordelia appeared in the doorway.

"Henry, the wringer is misbehaving. I wonder if you could fix it?" she began. "Darling, you will take care of Robert for half an hour? Nurse is in the laundry if you need her. I am glad you and Uncle Henry are becoming such friends," she added, with a smile for the tableau she had interrupted.

Henry followed to the laundry, but

presently returned for a screw-driver. He had come up the back stairs, and, as he turned to the front of the house, a voice from the nursery made him pause.

"Robert mustn't! No, no, naughty—must mind! Robert knows what happens when he doesn't mind Helena!"

A mumble of defiance was followed by a small crash. Helena jumped to her feet and stood for a moment at the open nursery door, listening intently. Henry, who had slipped into the room adjoining, was not seen. The nursery door was closed with ominous quiet.

What happened when Robert didn't mind Helena? The uncle felt an overwhelming desire to know, and, stealing to the nursery door, he opened it a noiseless inch. His gasp of swallowed laughter would have betrayed him if Helena had not been so absorbed. Where, in that household, had she learned how? Was the knowledge in the blood? Or had the unhappy experiences of little playmates enlightened her? Robert was turned across Helena's small knee at the historic angle, and

the slipper was descending with temperate but honest zeal. Even her little mouth had the traditional expression; it was firm but sorrowful, as though it said, "This hurts me more than it hurts you!"

An indignant roar followed Henry as, screw-driver in hand, he slipped quietly down the stairs again. His face, when he reappeared in the laundry, was so red that his sister reproached him for hurrying.

"Say, Cordy," he began, his eyes fixed on the screw he was tightening, "how long before Robert will be able to tell things—say what happens to him and all that?"

"Oh, not for a good many months. He is backward about speaking—he hasn't any words at all yet. Were the children all right?" Cordelia added as he said nothing.

"First-rate. Couldn't be better," was the emphatic answer. "Good idea, letting Helena take care of Robert. I'd leave them together a whole lot if I were you. Clever child, that."

"Oh, we do," said the mother fondly.

"Now don't you begin to see the value of the modern method, Henry?"

Henry's face was bent abruptly over his work.

"It has its points," he conceded.

XV

My Mother's Diary

JUNE 11: This is the end of our first day in the valley, and Yosemite is almost up to its photographs. The others weren't energetic, but Tom and I went to see the Bridal Veil, and sat there for an hour or more, discussing what seems to be the correct topic now, heaven versus extinction. He's an atheist, of course, but not a very bigoted one. I shouldn't wonder if in time he settled down into quite an orthodox agnostic. We got very solemn. If you care about sensations, the old place certainly does give you your money's worth. It seems queer to think that I, in my calfskin boots and leather leggings, have been going over the very ground that my mother traversed thirty years ago today, probably in paper soles and hoop skirts. She says that her engagement came out of that trip. I wonder if Yosemite always affects our

family that way! I ran across her little old diary just before I left, and I am going to read it each day after I have made my own record. Let's see what she says of the 11th of June. Two pages of purple peaks and glowing sentiments, then:

Sat on a rock with J. and talked of the immortality of the soul. Was troubled to find he had been assailed by the doubts so prevalent in this generation. Shall do all I can to clear his vision. Talked long and earnestly, went back much exalted by the grandeur and beauty on every side.

Yes, I know that uplifted, soul to soul feeling. Nowadays we call it religious flirtation. Is this generation coarser and less reverent, or simply more honest? I suppose J. stands for Joseph, who has since become my father and a pillar of the church. Mother did good work that trip.

June 12: I had a small adventure this morning, all by myself. I was up earlier than the rest, and it looked so lovely out that I

strolled a little way, and then a little farther, and still on up a fascinating trail. I was examining a stone I had found, which I was morally certain indicated a gold mine under my feet, and was trying to decide how I could stake out my claim, when a little sound in front of me made me look up. Not three feet away lay a huge rattlesnake, who had evidently just discovered me. We stood staring at each other for a few seconds without any interchange of courtesies. I was too scared to move, and I dare say he was. Then I flung my gold stone in his face and jumped back as far as I could. There was a *b-zz* that made my blood run cold, but it was his death rattle. He was very dead and very nasty.

At first I thought I would sit down and cry; then, running back to the hotel seemed more attractive; but finally pride and vainglory made me spear the vile thing upon a long forked stick and carry him back to impress the others. They were all out in front, wondering where I was, and everybody was nice and impressed and congratulatory, except Tom, who

chose to be cross as a bear about it and to sulk all day, probably because he didn't have the glory himself. He read me a long lecture on foolhardiness and not knowing when you ought to be afraid, just as if I hadn't been in an agony of fright the whole time. I suppose he would have admired me more if I had let the snake chase me home, so that he could rush out and throttle it with one hand and bear me fainting into the house with the other. Men say they like girls to be plucky and sensible and all that, but in their secret hearts they still adore the Clingy Vine kind. Next time I get into a tight place, and Tom is around, I'll give him a little exhibition of how Clingy Vine behaves under those circumstances, and we'll see how he likes it.

Now for my mother's June twelfth. More purple sentiments, which I'll skip, then:

I had a shock this morning, from which my nerves have scarcely yet recovered. The sense of horror still clings to me, and I dread going to sleep, knowing what my dreams will be. J. and I were following a path when sud-

denly we came upon a mammoth rattlesnake, which one of the guides had killed. We saw at once that the creature was dead, but his evil look, and the dread thought of what might have happened had he been alive, made me so faint that J. was obliged to support me to a seat, where I clung to him trembling and weeping in spite of my efforts at self-control. It was a long time before I was able to go on. He showed the greatest kindness and sympathy, and the gentlest consideration for my feminine timidity. I find in him some very noble traits, and his conversation is highly enjoyable.

My mother would have just suited Tom. If she had been alone and the snake alive, I wonder if she would have killed it herself! And do you suppose I might have trembled and wept if there had been any one on the spot to appreciate it? It isn't impossible.

June 13: We went up Cloud's Rest today: very fine. Edith wished she had a kodak, which Tom said would be about as much in place as a kazoo in a Beethoven symphony. He has rather devoted himself in that direction since I refused to be lectured more than a lim-

ited amount yesterday. Edith doesn't kill snakes. She squealed a little to-day when her horse shied, and Tom grew positively affectionate. All the same, I happen to know that once, when she was a little girl, she held up a mouse by its tail; and if she goes too far, I'll betray her. No present timidity can live down a past like that; and she can't deny the charge, for I stood on a table and shrieked while she did it. Oh, I can spoil her chances any moment I choose. I have had to content myself with Will all day, and, what was harder still, to content him with me. It isn't easy to rouse enthusiasm in a man who is all the time trying to overhear what another man is saying to another girl, and wishing said other man's horse would drop him over the edge of a cliff; but I finally did it. I asked him if he didn't think Edith had a lovely profile, and that caught his attention. Then I went on to her full face, and he began to expand; and by the time I had reached her eyelashes he was all responsiveness. At the end of half an hour we were so absorbed in our topic that we nearly took the wrong trail.

Edith was rather cool to me afterwards, which I call a little hard.

At the 13th, my mother has a tiny fern pasted over the following:

One of the party gathered this for my diary, as it would suggest the mighty handiworks of nature on which it had been gazing all its brief life, and added, "Take the bright shell to your home on the lea, And wherever it goes, it will sing of the sea." We had a long talk about poetry and its influence on the emotions, which I considered inferior to that of music. He did not agree with me, and quoted many beautiful lines from Mrs. Hemans and others to convince me, as we strolled up and down in the moonlight. J. was disposed to resent what he called my desertion of him, and maintained a gloomy front all the evening. I notice in him a tendency to domineer at times, due to his strong nature. He needs a softening influence.

Yes, Joseph, I've noticed that tendency in you occasionally, too. Poor papa, the 13th is an unlucky day for both of us! If I were thirty years previous, I would go out and stroll with you in the moonlight myself, and tell you

how "The rose had been washed, just washed by a shower, Which Mary to Anna conveyed," and we would make mother and Tom wildly jealous. We aren't fickle things, always taking up with another member of the party. Our heart is true to Poll, isn't it?

June 14: I had a chance this afternoon to show Tom how Clingy Vine acts in an emergency, but pride and a rival in that line prevented. We were going along a narrow trail when Edith's mule, who had some private grudge against mine, sneaked up behind and tried to take a piece out of poor Jonathan. He shrieked with rage and surprise, and gave an indignant buck, and, before I could recover, the saddle slipped around, and I found myself riding on the wrong side of his body. Not being skilled in the Human Fly act, I promptly fell off, and landed with a large part of me dangling over the Yosemite Fall. Of course I was picked up and dusted and fussed over all in a second; and I should have gone into hysterics if Edith hadn't got in ahead of me. It was selfish of her, for I am sure my nerves were

more upset than anybody's. The only alternative was to make myself as disagreeable as possible, which I did. Tom wanted to do all sorts of things—carry me home was one of them, I believe—but I told him Edith needed his attention more than I did. I didn't really suppose he would be discouraged so easily, but he fell back at once, and made her drink some brandy, and lent her his handkerchief.

This is the record of our last day in the Valley, for we leave to-morrow noon. Next time I visit Yosemite I am coming alone, and then, perhaps, I shall have some time for the scenery. Mother, too, seems to find human relations disturbing. The 14th hasn't a word about foaming cataracts, nor even a Biblical quotation:

There are some things about J. that disturb me not a little. When alone with me, he shows the fullest appreciation of the marvels around us, and a marked tendency to serious reflection; but when amidst a crowd, he displays a certain levity that jars, a mad desire to quiz from which nothing is sacred. His humor

is quick and sprightly, and I cannot help laughing at his jests, which serve to make him but the more popular with the other ladies; but the fear that they are the outcome of a certain lack of depth spoils my enjoyment. To-day, whilst riding along the edge of a precipice, his horse hit its foot against a stone and stumbled. Had J. been a poor horseman, they might both have been plunged to a horrible death. The thought of it even now blanches my cheek. Most men would have been sobered by such a possibility, but J. showed a laughing carelessness that jarred on my sensibilities. Am I too fanciful? I trust and pray that I may not show myself carping. We had a long and most delightful talk this evening on the beautifying influence of love, the glamour it casts over objects otherwise indifferent or even unsightly. In many things we are kindred spirits.

June 15: There is still half an hour before the stage goes, so I will make a last entry if people will only stop talking to me. We went to Mirror Lake early this morning, I clinging persistently and successfully to Will until he suddenly saw Edith standing all alone, gaz-

ing pensively at her own reflection in the water. That was too much. With one bound he had shaken himself free and was off; and when I collected my wits, I found myself discussing the beauties of nature with Tom. I could write yards about the lovely effects I saw in the next half hour, but it all condenses down to the fact that, on due provocation, I told Tom I loved him—which any idiot might have discovered weeks ago—and he explained his sentiments toward me, about which there had been some little confusion. I was inclined to be huffy when I found that Edith had been merely a blind, a ruse, to see how I would take it. I told him he had won me under false pretenses, for I never should have accepted him so promptly if I hadn't supposed he was trembling in the balance between Edith and me. But I am happy enough to forgive anybody anything.

He is pestering me now to come out for one last stroll, but I must take a look at mother's record for to-day. What if she and her J. chose the 15th on which to come together, too? I'll just glance, for my dear boy is saying softly,

with all a lover's impressioned romance, "Say, do brace up. The time is almost gone," and adding with tender pleading, "*Won't* you get a move on?"

I am sad at heart, and have shed many tears this beautiful day. Early this morning J. and I walked to Mirror Lake, and there he offered me the highest honor man can pay woman. He asked me to be his wife. Fond as I am of him, much as I admire his brilliant qualities, I feel that I can never care for him as a true wife should, and told him so, with all possible gentleness. He was much cast down, and even my offer of being a true and affectionate sister to him did little to lighten his misery. I trust I have not been to blame in any way and that he will not let one disappointment blight his life. Poor dear John!

John! Poor dear *John?* Then J. didn't stand for Joseph, and it wasn't papa at all. And after all those deep, soulful talks, and communings, she naïvely hopes she hasn't been to blame in any way! My dear mother, I think you must have forgotten what was in that old

diary when you said I might take it. There are some things that even your frivolous daughter doesn't do. I may not inspire a man to lead a better life, but I don't let him offer himself to me unless I mean to accept him. Yes, Tom, I'm coming. My mother's diary ends here, but across the corner of this last page is written:

Had a long talk with another member of the party. He asked me to call him Joseph, and I said I would. Small conventionalities seem out of place in this grand environment.

And this while poor John is eating his heart out with grief! O mamma!

XVI

A Spoiled Old Lady

ADELAIDE'S first visit to her grandmother, paid when she was fourteen, had been the most wonderful event of her life—of any girl's life, she was inclined to think. In spite of her mother's proud reminiscences, a childish conception of a softly shapeless old lady, knitting by a sunny window, had persisted in her expectations as the inevitable grandmother. She was prepared to be driven in a carryall to an old-fashioned mansion, shaded by elms, in Fifty-second Street, New York City; the cat would rise from its red cushion at her timid entrance, and her grandmother would give her peppermints between naps and cups of tea. And there would be quaint paintings, pink wild roses on black panels, sweetly frail ladies with slanting eyes and pointed fingers, since her grandmother had in her day been known as

Adelaide Sayre, the artist. Young Adelaide had gone eagerly prepared to be the daily blessing and comfort, the willing runner of errands and finder of spectacles, that any earnest reader of Miss Alcott must hold as the ideal grandchild. She would even read aloud nightly from the Bible, she resolved in a burst of devotion, as she followed her mother from the train at Forty-second Street.

The whirl of new sensations that succeeded had left her speechless, weighted by a shy awkwardness that was smilingly explained as fatigue from the long journey. The pert little dark-blue brougham had been the first shock; next came the marble halls and uniformed boys, the big elevator, like a velvet-padded room; and then, instead of a kerchiefed knitter under the elms, a handsome, well-dressed, energetic woman, a gay, voluble person, obviously not in the least in need of a little comfort, who laughed and ordered every one about, and said witty, delightful things, and glanced into the mirror whenever she passed it, as well she might.

And the paintings! It was twenty-four hours before Adelaide was calm enough to look at them and banish forever any idea of flower-wreathed panels. They were portraits of living men and women; big, bold figures, as salient from the canvas as her grandmother's personality from the dark splendor of her drawing-room. The reconstruction had to be complete: not even the cat survived.

They had arrived on Monday, and so were comfortably settled in time for what Mrs. Sayre explained as her Tuesday evenings. "Let the child sit up; it will amuse her," she had said, and so, about the time Adelaide should have been giving her first granddaughterly reading from the Bible, she was lurking in a corner in her best gown, and saw the rooms fill with strange and brilliant figures, among whom her grandmother moved like a reigning sovereign, surrounded wherever she paused by a jovial court. She kept the talk and laughter going with an irresistible enthusiasm, and they all, young and old, filled every chink and cranny in the gayety with a compliment to her charm

or her wit or her looks, and there was not one compliment too small or mean to bring a dimpling smile, though even then Adelaide noticed that those about her looks pleased her most.

The evening had been still more enchanting when Cousin Emma, a kindly, colorless person who did the marketing and arranged the flowers, sat down beside her and told her who the various visitors were: that one had written books that were in the library at home, another edited the magazine lying on the table, another had painted pictures that she must be taken to see. It was an evening from a fairy tale. And when a writer of beloved stories for young people took her cordially by the hand and said he was always glad to meet anyone whose name began with Adelaide Sayre, no matter what it ended with, she could only dash out of the room and burst into tears of sheer glory.

And now she was coming back, ten years older, schooled and colleged, experienced in social doings, with several offers of marriage to her credit, and an energetic theory ready for

every aspect of life, honest, cocksure, tender-hearted and exceedingly pretty, to visit this same wonderful grandmother. That Mrs. Sayre also would be ten years older she accepted, but did not quite realize; she fancied the fairy tale as going on with undiminished splendor. And this time she was to be a part of it, instead of a little frightened outsider; the thought made her lips curve joyously, bringing out a tempered resemblance to her grandmother Sayre.

Cousin Emma, more pallid and dim than ever, said repeatedly on the way from the station how glad she was that Adelaide had come.

"You will do your grandmother good," she said, not without wistfulness. Adelaide, remembering her little-comfort aspirations of ten years before, smiled to herself.

"Grandmother is more likely to do me good, I imagine," she said. But she understood better when she entered the drawing-room—not quite so large or so splendid as she remembered it—and took her grandmother's outstretched hands. Somewhere in the interval

Mrs. Sayre had crossed the line and entered the territory of old age, but not willingly, nor with the grace of patience. She had chosen to ignore it, as she might have ignored a muddy skirt or the blunder of a domestic.

"Well, my dear! I am glad to see you. And how pretty you have turned out!" was her greeting. Adelaide kissed with quick compassion the cheek that ten years before had been so firm and smooth, and whose color had been the natural autumn of maturity instead of this pitiful glazed pink.

"Mother has hopes that I shall grow to look like you, grandmother," she answered; then wondered if she had said anything to offend, in the blank pause that followed. Cousin Emma, under pretense of helping her to unhook her boa, murmured hastily:

"Speak more slowly and distinctly."

"If you and Adelaide have secrets to whisper about, Emma, I will leave you together," was the sharp interruption.

"Indeed, no, dear!" Emma pleaded. "Adelaide, don't you think it is amazing how

little your grandmother has changed in ten years?"

"I think I have changed more than either of you," said Adelaide.

Mrs. Sayre smiled indulgently. "But very much for the better, my dear! But you must be tired; I am going to take you to your room. I beg you, Emma, keep your shawl for your own rheumatic shoulders! I am not quite in my dotage." She led the way with tremulous dignity, her handsome gown, accented waist line and firmly tailored shoulders contrasting oddly with the curved back of old age, which no padding or lacing could mitigate. Cousin Emma followed meekly, the rejected shawl held as unobtrusively as possible over one arm.

"We shall have gay times, you and I, Adelaide," her grandmother announced, a gleam of the old briskness in her eyes and voice. "Emma will have her hands full chaperoning us. Now I want you to rest, for you know this is one of my Tuesday evenings. The crowd changes from year to year—I grow more ex-

clusive and admit fewer; but it never falls off in quality, does it, Emma?"

"Indeed, no. You always have wonderful people," Emma said, with an eagerness that was dimly apologetic. Mrs. Sayre accepted this with a dignified patience that seemed to say, "Of course poor Emma cannot help being obvious and tiresome, but I think she does appreciate me."

"I have sent for young Dwight Marshall to entertain you, Adelaide," she went on. "His father was an old love of mine. He would do anything for me till the hour of his death—though he married a very worthy little person from the West and was always good to her."

"And the son seems to have inherited the devotion," Cousin Emma put in. "He sends Aunt Adelaide a great box of roses every Christmas, just as his father used to do. He thinks the world of her."

"Oh, Emma exaggerates!" But Mrs. Sayre was evidently not displeased. She submitted to the shawl as she turned to leave; or,

rather, ignored its quiet placing across her shoulders. In the doorway she paused.

"You see, I have put you in the room next to mine," she said graciously. "Sometimes I sleep badly, and reading aloud is not Emma's forte! She is a good soul" (with an affable nod), "but she stumbles among the words like a child learning to walk. I think her eyes are failing, but she is too vain to admit it." She shook her head in humorous reproach.

"Everybody's eyes can't be as wonderful as yours, dear aunt," Adelaide heard Emma say as she closed the door.

Still in her hat and coat, the girl sat down on the edge of the bed and stared dubiously at her boots. Disappointment, dismay, pity, indignation even, crowded her tired brain, culminating in a forlorn laugh.

"Anyway, the Tuesday evenings still go on," she reflected, rising with a sigh to put away her things.

Adelaide appeared in the drawing-room just before dinner, wearing her prettiest gown, a flush of renewed anticipation in her cheeks.

Cousin Emma, who was there alone, dressed in dim, drab colors, looked uneasily at the deep folds of soft old blue falling all about the little bronze slippers, the bare shoulders, the velvet bow in the bright bronze hair.

"My dear, must you wear that?" she asked, rising nervously to her feet.

"But why not?" Adelaide looked bewildered. "Do you mean the low neck? Doesn't everyone?"

"Oh, yes, of course, and you look lovely." Cousin Emma hesitated and flushed. "Only, you see, your grandmother—she cannot wear what she once could, and it is naturally hard for her to see—" She broke down under Adelaide's stare of honest noncomprehension. "Of course, you look lovely; only, when one has been the center for so many years— Oh, Aunt Adelaide, and this is the new lavender silk! Doesn't she look like a piece of Dresden, Adelaide?"

The old lady came forward graciously, smiling with satisfaction, her elaborate head high, her little blue eyes glancing under a fine

lady droop of wrinkled lids above the pitiful pink of her cheeks. But the satisfaction died abruptly when she saw her granddaughter, fresh and lovely, careless of where the light fell on her girlish throat and shoulders.

"H'm! You look very fine," she said shortly. "I wore things like that myself once." Her hand went to the chiffon folds that swathed her throat almost to the ears. "You will have all the cavaliers to yourself, which, I suppose, is all you care about. Emma, when will dinner be ready? This is the third time within a week that I have had to wait and wait."

Emma apologized and soothed and complimented, but to little purpose. Mrs. Sayre ate her dinner in aggressive silence, broken by an occasional sharp comment upon the follies and vanities of youth. Adelaide tried her best to be brightly unconscious of the atmosphere; but she was hurt and astonished, and not a little indignant. Jealous of one's own grandchild? It was incredible. After dinner Cousin Emma tried deviously to get a private word with her, some urgent request dis-

tending her pale eyes; but Adelaide was in no mood to make concessions, and would not see the cautious signals.

Then Dwight Marshall came, boyish, thickset, friendly and direct—"her kind," as she decided with quick satisfaction. She knew in two minutes that he found her charming; and yet he was evidently in the secret, for he talked almost exclusively to Mrs. Sayre until the rooms began to fill.

Not that they actually filled, as in the old days; but Adelaide counted some twenty arrivals. At first she was too absorbed in meeting the individuals to see the assemblage as a whole. Her little blue eyes and bronze hair and the sweeping folds of old blue silk brought her instant importance, and she was talking with happy animation to an increasing group when a glimpse of Cousin Emma's face, distressed almost to tears, made her look about, startled. Over by the table where the coffee service was always placed sat her grandmother, quite alone. Her court was surrounding Adelaide.

The girl hesitated in dismay, uncertain how to act: Mrs. Sayre's face did not invite artless approach. But the others, following her glance, evidently understood, for one by one they began to drift over to the coffee table. Mrs. Sayre did not unbend readily, but they drew up chairs and begged for coffee and admired her lavender gown until finally the thin lips relaxed and she shone upon them again, a wintry warmth not without an occasional nip to it.

Adelaide, left free to move about, realized for the first time the strangeness of the assemblage. There were white-bearded old men, feeble or weary, with the keenness of their eyes faded to dim kindliness, notably one who strayed persistently from group to group assuring each with a childish laugh that he had not missed one of Mrs. Sayre's Tuesdays in thirty years. There were women who suggested queer cults, women with massive noses or projecting teeth or high, rapid voices echoing long years of argument; wisps of vegetarianism and dull, complacent widows of great men long dead;

illustrators of obscure magazines, singers whom no one ever asked to sing. Two young women, eager-eyed for celebrities, pursued Cousin Emma with excited whispers of, "Who is that one? What does he do?" and were plainly disappointed in the answers.

"Nothing but dictionary makers and relatives of dead authors!" Adelaide heard one of them complain to the other. It was a motley, shabby crowd; the splendid court of ten years before had suffered a grievous enchantment.

Did Mrs. Sayre know? She was moving among them with as much of her old-time air as her feebler carriage could convey, seeming wholly complacent at the cracked and ancient homage. The compliments had grown vapid, foolish, but no chance for one was passed over: that seemed to be the recognized price of admission. Why they came could be surmised: a very few for old times' sake, the majority because they had nowhere else to go, or because the glamour of a past exclusiveness still made their admission seem a triumph; one or two,

perhaps, because they actually needed the coffee and cake. They petted Mrs. Sayre and repeated themselves dutifully at her impatient "What's that? What's that? How you all do mumble!" and smiled or sighed about her in corners when they could escape from court duty. The calm satisfaction of her bearing suddenly reminded Adelaide of a broken-down prima donna she had once seen bowing to the applause, half derisive and half kindly, of a vaudeville audience, and she could have burst into tears as she did ten years before. She turned abruptly away, and so came face to face with Dwight Marshall while her eyes were still full of distress.

He seemed to understand.

"Your grandmother has been a remarkable woman in her day," he said with grave directness. "People will always be very kind to her."

"Kind? You call this kind?" There was indignation in the protest. "They are making a fool of her, they are humoring her and then laughing at her. It isn't kind! How

do you think she would feel if she saw herself as you all see her? It would kill her. People have petted her vanity till it has blinded and deafened her, and she was too fine to be treated like that. If I found you had a weakness for drink, and then on every occasion I urged it on you until you could not live without it, would you call that kind?"

Marshall looked startled. "No one meant it in that way," he protested.

"It isn't as if she were feeble-minded —so old that there was nothing to do but keep her amused till the end," Adelaide went on more calmly. "She is still a capable citizen; a little deafness won't let her out of her responsibilities. She understands well enough, I am sure of it; so did the prima donna—only you don't know about that. It is not that I don't respect old age, Mr. Marshall, truly. Only don't you think even old age has to help earn its respect? Do I sound hard?"

He obviously did not think her hard; but he would not agree.

"I don't see how you can discipline

people who are over sixty," he said. "They get what they demand."

"People have to be disciplined at any age if they need it. And she does." Adelaide relaxed into a smile. "She is the most spoiled old lady I ever met!" He looked amused.

"What are you going to do about it? You know there is a vulgar saying, 'Don't teach your grandmother——'"

"I know; you need not finish it. I don't see why I should not unspoil her a little, quite politely. I certainly shall not offer up a compliment for every breath she draws." Then she colored with a sudden thought. "I have not meant to be disloyal," she said quickly.

"Oh, I am almost one of the family," he reassured her. Obviously he did not think her disloyal.

When the last guest had gone, Adelaide tumbled wearily into bed, too tired even to take down her hair. After two hours of what she called "stumping sleep," a dull sound, repeated at intervals, dragged her back to consciousness. When she realized that it was a knocking on

the wall beside her, her senses cleared with a start, and, catching up a wrapper, she ran into her grandmother's room with a sinking apprehension of vague terrors known as "attack" and "seizure."

Mrs. Sayre was sitting up in bed, wrapped in a pale-blue dressing gown, a shaded lamp at her elbow.

"My dear," she said impressively, "I have not closed my eyes. I am sorry to awaken you, but then young people go right to sleep again. Suppose you read to me for a while; I am sure your voice is soothing."

"Yes, certainly. I will get on something warmer." At the instant, Adelaide felt only relief, though there was a suppressed firmness in her movements when she came back from her room a few moments later. A memory of the projected Bible readings of ten years ago made her smile a little grimly as she took up the indicated novel.

The reading was so successful that in half an hour the wrinkled lids had drooped over the little blue eyes. Adelaide let her voice grad-

ually die down, then put out the light and stole away. It was a long time before she could get to sleep herself.

"Adelaide is an excellent reader," said Mrs. Sayre contentedly in the morning. "I think she will be a great comfort to me." Adelaide tried to look gratified, but the idea of being a comfort seemed to have lost some of its glamour in the last ten years.

Three times during the week that followed the knocking on the wall brought Adelaide scrambling back from slumber. She began to sleep uneasily, expecting to be called and starting up at imaginary sounds. When Dwight Marshall accused her of looking fagged, she ruefully confessed the truth, on the accepted basis that he was almost one of the family.

"Of course, if she were ill I should think nothing of it," she protested. "But it is just that she likes the amusement; she is simply spoiled."

"Put dope in her coffee," he suggested.

"She ought to give the coffee up; that

would be the sensible thing," was the energetic answer. Marshall smiled; he liked her emphatic assertions.

"If I were you, I would sleep through the knocking," he said.

The words came back to her that night, checking a startled impulse to rise at the familiar summons. She covered her ears and lay guiltily still. Mrs. Sayre rapped again, and then again, more sharply. Adelaide stealthily pulled the pillow over her head. The knocking persisted for half an hour, but without success. Mrs. Sayre was probably asleep long before her grandchild was.

"Dear me, Adelaide, you slept like the dead last night," was her greeting in the morning. "I could not rouse you."

"I was very tired," Adelaide began evasively, then took a courageous resolve. "You see, I am not used to being waked up in the night," she said brightly, "and it has made me sleep very brokenly and badly. Don't you suppose, if I read to you before I went to bed, that would get you to sleep earlier?"

Mrs. Sayre was eying her more in astonishment than anger.

"H'm! Emma has never complained at being waked in the night," she said.

"Well, Cousin Emma looks very worn and nervous. You know, dear grandmother, she ought not to seem a dozen years older than you!" This concession to policy softened resentment to plaintiveness.

"Young people think only of themselves! If you knew what it is to lie awake hour after hour——"

"Do you suppose that your coffee—" Adelaide ventured.

"Nonsense! Coffee never hurt me yet," was the impatient answer, and the subject was dropped. Nevertheless, Adelaide did not seem to have lost favor by her stand. And she was not wakened again.

"Having succeeded, I feel rather unkind and ashamed," she confided to Dwight Marshall in one of the rare moments when they were left together. As a rule, Mrs. Sayre monopolized his calls.

"But it is missionary work—the unspoiling of a grandmother," he said teasingly. "I am immensely interested, you know. Do you mind if I come very often—to hear the reports?"

She admitted gravely that she did not mind. Then their eyes met, and they laughed. "Oh, I do like New York!" thought Adelaide breathlessly.

Her grandmother, coming in later, found Marshall's card on the table.

"I have been in all the afternoon," she said indignantly. "Why was I not told he was here?"

"I believe you were lying down, grandmother," Adelaide began. Then the approval in Emma's pale eyes warned her that she was slipping. "Besides, I really think he came to see me this time," she added frankly. Cousin Emma made a sign of dismayed warning. Mrs. Sayre, still holding the card, eyed her and her pretty white gown in cold astonishment.

"I suppose you think that of everyone who comes to the house," she said ironically.

"Indeed, I don't! But Mr. Marshall —well, honestly, grandmother, isn't it sort of natural?" Mrs. Sayre's mood wavered a moment, then she actually relaxed into a smile.

"Well, honestly, my dear, I suppose it is!" she admitted. "The old women must expect to go into the background," she added with a sigh.

"Indeed, Aunt Adelaide, no one who saw your Tuesday nights could think that," Emma put in eagerly. Mrs. Sayre ignored this, and sat with her keen old eyes meditating on Adelaide in a way that made the latter tremble for what might be coming. It proved even worse than she had expected.

"You have seen two of my Tuesdays, Adelaide. What do you think of them?"

Cousin Emma was aquiver with signals. The girl's color rose, but she answered sturdily:

"I think, dear grandmother, that they are not worthy of you."

"Worthy of me! I should like to know what you mean by that!"

"I don't think most of those who come are—good enough," Adelaide persisted; "and some of them are not even real friends."

Mrs. Sayre was plainly angry.

"No doubt my circle is not just what you have been accustomed to in Portland, Oregon," she said blandly. "You must forgive me if I do not consider you qualified to judge a New York assemblage. Emma, what are you making faces about? It is a most annoying habit. If you will indicate the sort of persons you are pining for, Adelaide, I will send cards, though I rarely increase my circle." Adelaide was persistently good-tempered.

"You asked for my honest opinion, grandmother," she said plaintively; "it isn't fair to snub me because I gave it!"

"One must be patient with the crude ignorance of youth," said Mrs. Sayre, turning away. She was reserved and haughty at dinner and all the evening, ignoring Adelaide's bright friendliness as well as Emma's consolatory flattery; but when Adelaide was putting out her light that night, a knock on the wall

summoned her. She went with alacrity, feeling secretly guilty and troubled.

"My dear," said Mrs. Sayre formally, "I do not wish you to think that I disapprove of your frankness. There is even a certain relief in it; Emma is cloying at times. When you are more at home here, you will find that there are some fine and valued persons at my Tuesday gatherings. I have no objection to saying that there are also some very tiresome old frumps. Good night."

Adelaide impulsively took the frail old hand and kissed it. It was a warmly real tribute. The fixed dignity of her grandmother's face softened to a smile when she was alone.

From that night dated Mrs. Sayre's dependence on her grandchild—a reserved dependence, seldom expressed, yet showing daily more plainly. Cousin Emma had made several attempts to reduce Adelaide's plumage to her own dim drabs, but the girl had firmly continued to make herself look as pretty as possible, and her grandmother's hostility had gradually diminished. She now began to consult

Adelaide about her own clothes, somewhat to the latter's dismay, for her honesty was her most cherished principle as well as her strongest impulse, and there was scant room for it in Mrs. Sayre's wardrobe. On a morning that Adelaide never forgot, she went, an unwilling prisoner in the little blue brougham, to help choose an evening gown. The dressmaker, an adroit and soothing Frenchwoman, showed soft grays and lustrous black-and-whites, but Mrs. Sayre's fancy was caught by the shimmer of a delicate rose crêpe.

"I don't see why I could not wear that," she said critically. "Pink was always my color."

The dressmaker was of the opinion that madame could wear it charmingly. She threw folds of it over Mrs. Sayre's shoulder, adroitly lowering the shade of the big window by the mirror, and turned to Adelaide with the triumphant air of a conjurer who has produced the rabbit. Then she disappeared in quest of the exactly appropriate lace.

Mrs. Sayre studied her image compla-

cently in the long triple mirror, while Adelaide turned away, sick at heart. There was something ghastly in the contrast of that fresh, delicate rose with the worn face and curved back. The pink of the sunken cheeks seemed to stand out ironically.

"Well, what do you think, my dear?" The cheerful question set her heart throbbing heavily.

"Let us try this gray again, grandmother," she suggested. "I don't know but that it is prettier." Mrs. Sayre was instantly suspicious.

"I suppose you think I am too old for this," she said sharply. "I can't see why young girls should monopolize the pretty things."

"Nor I," Adelaide was glad to assent; but she could not get off with that.

"Well, then, why do you disapprove of the pink?"

She hesitated, then firmly clutched her courage. "It does not seem to me as becoming as the gray. It makes you look older."

Mrs. Sayre frowned into the glass.

"I do not see it," she said severely. "The room is absurdly dark; suppose you pull up that shade."

Adelaide meant to lift the shade an inch or two, but the cord slipped from her fingers and it shot up to the top, letting in a merciless stream of light. She stood helpless in an anguish of pity as the old lady stared at herself, unmistakably artificial, old, and unbeautiful, growing slowly pale about her compressed lips. Adelaide saw a shaking hand pressing heavily on a chair back, yet could not lift her eyes from the fashion plates she was blindly turning.

The dressmaker came back, her hands full of lace. Mrs. Sayre turned away from the mirror.

"I like this very well," she said in her usual assured tones. "I think I will order it, but I will take a day to consider. You might save the gray, too. Well, Adelaide, shall we do any more shopping? I believe I am rather tired."

"Do let us go home," said Adelaide eagerly. Later, in the brougham, she pressed

her cheek for an instant against her grandmother's shoulder.

"You are so splendid," she murmured impulsively. "I am proud to belong to you!"

"You are a good child, Adelaide," was the bland answer. If Mrs. Sayre suffered, no one saw it, though she looked haggard in the morning, as though from sleeplessness. Neither the gray nor the pink was ordered. And so ended the days of her splendor.

"Everyone has to face things," Adelaide argued to her troubled heart, still shrinking at the white shock she had witnessed.

An unexpected result of this incident was the growth of a veiled pride in Adelaide's freshness and charm. With the end of her own triumphs confronting her, Mrs. Sayre seemed to transfer to the girl's interests a measure of the restless vanity that had hitherto been all for herself. She became greedy of compliments for Adelaide, though she was still sufficiently human not to repeat them. A shade of haughtiness crept over the bland satisfaction of her Tuesday evening manner. Once she inter-

rupted a laborious admirer, dutifully paying for his coffee, with a disconcerting "Nonsense!" adding at his astonished stare, "You see that child over there? Keep your admiration for her—only she is too good for it!" He edged away and confided to a brother sycophant that the old lady was failing very fast, and they ate a double quantity of cake in melancholy foreboding.

And it was true; Mrs. Sayre was failing. The signs seemed to come from every direction at once, as though they had long been preparing and only awaited some signal. She began to shrink from her rigorously fashionable clothes, appearing most often in a softly shapeless black cashmere, and the pitiful pink showed in her cheeks only on Tuesday nights. These occasions seemed to tire her out, and there came one when, having a slight cold, she consented to let Adelaide make her excuses to her guests. When the girl was dressed, she called her in and looked at her with quiet satisfaction.

"You will do; you are a worthy repre-

sentative, my dear," she said. "They will not miss me."

"I shall miss you," said Adelaide with a quick impulse of tenderness. "As for those old frumps," daringly, "we don't care, do we?"

"Not especially!" with a faint smile.

The evening dragged heavily. Most of the old habitués had dropped off during the winter, and the assemblage, freed from the restraint of Mrs. Sayre's presence, seemed to Adelaide more strange and sycophantic and greedy than ever. She resented their familiar ease in the dignified luxury of her grandmother's drawing-room, their loud voices and open relief in the freedom from court duty. Several had lit cigarettes: "We know you don't mind—you're too jolly!" they explained to Adelaide.

"Wouldn't I like to turn them all out!" was her fierce thought as eleven o'clock came and they showed no signs of leaving. Some one had brought a new guest, a red-haired young man aggressively at ease, who had been addressing her at intervals with a cheerful "Say,"

and he was now called on for one of his evidently famous monologues.

He prepared for his act by putting on a derby hat very much over one eye and turning up his coat collar, and took his place opposite the lounging semicircle. Several had pulled Mrs. Sayre's velvet cushions to the floor and were seated on them, familiar elbows resting on her stately brocade couches; a young woman with her foot tucked under her occupied the chair of state by the solemn mahogany table and peered freely into the coffeepot when her cup was empty. A thin drift of smoke hung under the chandelier.

" Me nyme is Artie," began the monologist, then stopped short with a dismayed stare that led all eyes to the other end of the room. The portières had parted, and Mrs. Sayre, in all the glory of lavender silk, old lace and diamonds, stood quietly surveying the scene. The pink of her cheeks was war paint to their shocked nerves.

They started to scramble to their feet, but she checked them with a gesture.

"I beg you will not let me interrupt," she said pleasantly. "I am anxious to hear. I have always been fond of a good recitation." She took the chair some one pushed forward for her and turned her keen little blue eyes, terrible in their bland courtesy, on the speaker. The others sank back shamefacedly, or slipped into chairs, extinguishing their cigarettes in their coffee cups. The monologist stammered an excuse, but Mrs. Sayre was inexorable, so he went through his act with desperate bravado to such empty laughter as they could manage. When it was over, she thanked him with a merciless politeness and made a stately tour through the awkward groups, pausing to speak to each. Some one made an eager move to say good night.

"One moment," said Mrs. Sayre, and her voice reached and silenced them all. She stood with the tips of her frail fingers resting on the coffee table. "You have all been most kind in coming to see me so faithfully," she went on, with a courtesy that stung. "I have appreciated it, as any old woman must appreci-

ate unselfish devotion. But I find myself less strong, too easily tired even by the pleasures of hospitality. And so I am obliged to tell you that this will be the last of my Tuesday evenings at home. I regret it, and I thank you from my heart."

She stood in her place until the last one had said good night and escaped; then she went to her room and closed the door.

Cousin Emma stared in pale awe at Adelaide.

"How did it happen—how did she know?"

"I went and told her." The girl was half frightened, half triumphant. "I asked her to come and look at them through the portières an hour ago. But I never dreamed she would do this. Still, aren't you glad?"

"Oh, I don't know. She will miss them," said Emma uneasily.

Adelaide did not see how anyone could feel the lack of such festivities, yet she had to acknowledge a dim pathos when the next Tuesday evening came. Mrs. Sayre had dressed

elaborately, as though the habit were too strong to be put away at once, and, as the clock approached nine, her eyes kept turning expectantly toward the door.

Adelaide slipped down on the hearth-rug with her cheek against her grandmother's knee. "It is nice not to have that tiresome crowd here, isn't it?" she said.

"Oh, yes, yes, a great relief." Mrs. Sayre had started slightly at the reminder, and she now leaned back heavily in her chair. "A great relief," she repeated wearily. When the portière was pushed back a few moments later, she half started to her feet, and Adelaide saw, with dismay, that her eyes brightened, to cloud again as only a servant with firewood appeared.

"But they were hateful old deceiving frumps," she assured herself.

At bedtime she begged to read aloud, but the old lady was gently inaccessible, lost in her own thoughts.

"Suppose we ask some new people for Tuesday nights—nice ones," suggested Adelaide, lingering in the doorway.

"My dear, everyone who knows me has been at liberty to come," was the stately answer. "We will not send out into the highways. Good night."

All that week Mrs. Sayre seemed very feeble, sitting often in half smiling blankness, wholly content if Adelaide was near her. When Tuesday evening came and she appeared in the soft negligée of other nights, they hoped she would not remember, and Adelaide welcomed Dwight Marshall with a warning against any reminder of what day it was. The old lady let him talk to her for a few minutes, then, with a hint of her old briskness, she sent Cousin Emma to see that the library fire was going well and the lamp lit.

"I shall leave this fire to you two young people," she said. "You are a good boy, Dwight, but it is not the grandmother you come to see." She went away smiling at their confusion.

Dwight, seeing Adelaide's cheeks crimson, found courage to take one of her hands and press it gently between his.

"Well, it isn't, you know!" he said. "You do know it, don't you?"

An hour or two later they went to the library hand in hand. "We mustn't wholly forget the perfectly trained grandmother," he had suggested.

"Ah, don't!" she exclaimed.

In the doorway they paused. The old lady sat alone in the glow of the lamp, her head resting on her hand. Weakness and weariness were in every line; the shadow of the end lay on her worn face. Spread on the table beside her in a wide semicircle were rows and rows of photographs, most of them old and faded—men whose faces showed strength, or personality, or talent, handsome women in quaint garb once brilliantly fashionable, or with intellectual foreheads and poised penholders or magazines under their elbows, a goodly company of personages, many of them bearing names written in the history of the city or of the nation, all worthy of a renowned drawing-room. Mrs. Sayre was spending Tuesday evening with her friends.

Adelaide abruptly turned away, and they left unseen. In the other room she leaned her arms on the mantelpiece and stared into the coals, her eyes wide with some growing distress.

"You have been a great comfort to her, Adelaide," Dwight reminded her. She faced him with a gesture of misery.

"I have killed her," she said hotly. "Oh, don't you see! I took away her vanity, her pride. It was that that kept her up; that held her together; and I knew so much, I called her spoiled and took it away. No, don't say anything; I tell you, I know! I have been feeling it vaguely for weeks, ever since one dreadful day at the dressmaker's, but I didn't understand till this minute. I let her see that the effort wasn't worth while, and when she began to let go, there was nothing to stop her. Oh, it is horrible." She pressed her face into her palms.

"Adelaide," he protested, "you have been the joy of her life. All this just means that her time has come."

She shook her head.

" Perhaps it is better for her to go than to stay as she was," she said sadly, " but that doesn't help me. I was a presumptuous fool. I killed her."

XVII

The Rule of the Magnificent

FATHER couldn't bear Barry Hammond, and the more he came to see Nan, the crosser father grew.

"I don't see what you can find to admire in a dude," he broke out one day, when Barry was coming to dinner. Mr. Hammond isn't a dude, but he dresses well, and father never will admit that brains and a high collar can go together. "Why don't you invite somebody that knows something—like Fred Richardson? There's a young man that's worth while. He'll be a partner by the time he's thirty-five."

Nan was the only one of us who had sense enough not to argue with father.

"We will have Fred, too, some time," she said serenely.

Father kept going back to the charge at

intervals. To tell the truth, I had a sneaking sympathy with the way he felt about Mr. Hammond, for, though the latter was unaffected and sincere and thoroughly likable, as well as socially important, I never felt absolutely at ease with him, as I did, for instance, with Fred Richardson. I always said "carn't," and suppressed all the "my goodnesses" of ordinary speech when he was around—as I suppose I ought to have done all the time, like Nan. And I couldn't get over a sense that we were honored by his friendship, though Nan would have utterly withered me if I had let my elation up to the surface. She took him as composedly as she did silk linings.

Nevertheless, I hadn't an atom of sympathy with what father did that night, for, fired with a wish to show Nan "how a dude looks beside a real man," he invited Fred to come home to dinner "just as he was." And poor Fred, never dreaming that he was part of a plot, and always grateful for a chance even to look at Nan, smoothed his hair and came. Father was wild to make that a match and take

Fred into the firm, but he did not understand Nan, or the moral influence of perfect grooming. The contrast all worked the wrong way, and father, dimly recognizing a failure, was more sarcastic than ever about high collars.

Barry Hammond kept on coming, and it wasn't hard to tell what brought him, though Nan never lost her dignified serenity, or talked of him with any significance. And father kept on growling. You see, Mr. Hammond treated him with a well-bred, courteous indifference that was as genuine as it was unconscious, and father, who had grown used to being a pretty big person down town, resented the attitude without knowing quite what it was that irritated him. He snubbed the young man on every occasion, and the latter, uniformly polite, didn't even know it, evidently thinking that Nan had a crusty old father, but that it needn't bother them. Finally, father's irritation came to a definite point.

"See here," he said to me one day; "I'll tell you one thing, and I want you to tell it to Nan. That young dude isn't going to

marry into this family. If Nan insists on having him, she won't get one cent from me. You tell her that."

I reasoned a little, with the usual result of making him more set than ever.

"Bring along a man that's got some force, some control over other men, and doesn't spend half his time parting his hair, and I'll give my consent; but not to this starched-up dude," he said. Power over other men was father's standard of greatness, his secret passion.

Nan was furious about it, but when Barry asked her to marry him, a few days later, she refused.

"I don't care anything about father's consent," she said, when she told me about it, "but I wasn't going to have Barry go and see him in his inspired moments, and hear himself called a 'dood.' I didn't care to explain this, so it was simpler just to say I wouldn't."

"Then he won't be coming here any more?" I asked, half relieved and half sorry. Nan looked a little disconcerted.

"Oh, yes; I think he will come—about as usual. It wasn't so final as all that," she said.

It was in absolute unconsciousness that Barry worked out his own salvation, which began a few nights after the coming of the majestic Bradley. It was Nan who insisted on our having a butler, for the rest of us would have been satisfied with a maid, a pretty one with a cap, for the table. Dear me, two years before we'd have felt rather grand to have had the dinner served by any one but the flushed and ponderous person who cooked it. But now that we were established in the new house, Nan would have a butler, and had her own way, as usual.

We thought we were pretty well used to the new order of things, by that time. We had learned to throw out the flowers the minute the first freshness was gone, and to take lists when we went shopping for fear we'd forget something (before we had been chiefly afraid we'd remember); and when Alice found a tailor who did her a plain blue serge for

eighty dollars, we told about it as a wonderful bargain. Our blue serges had previously cost about fifteen dollars a head, but we weren't consciously putting on airs. It doesn't take long to get into the way of saying "only eighty," and really meaning it. But that horrible butler made two whole years' experience seem as nothing.

You see, he had lived with people who had said "only eighty" all their lives, the really grand people, who didn't care to know us a bit more now than they had in our dark ages. The first night, by the time we had squeezed the lemon on our raw oysters, he had begun to find us out, and "the soup put him dead on," as Bert afterwards said. For, you know, poor old father has had to work too hard all his life to pay much attention to what he calls our monkey business, and of course, mother being dead so long, he has grown careless. We don't bother him, for it is thanks to him that we do know some of the little refinements of life and that our children are going to know more (I shouldn't wonder if our

grandchildren were real swells). But I think Nan winces a little.

As the dinner went on, Bradley—that was the butler's name—grew more and more haughty, and by dessert the back of his neck appeared to have petrified. We made talk and were terribly obliging and pleasant, all except father, who kept an uneasy silence, and jumped half a foot when Bradley stooped majestically and murmured a few words down his back.

"H'r? What's that?" he exclaimed, looking as if he expected a bomb.

"What kind of wine do you want, father?" Nan interpreted, with a shade of impatience.

That was the beginning of a dismal period in which an intelligent, strong-minded American family was terrorized by one stuck-up snob of a butler. Nan was the only one who didn't grow thin and nervous, and father had a real attack of dyspepsia the third day, from eating under such a strain. Our funniest stories, our brightest repartee, never brought a flicker of human sympathy to that stern face

hovering over the feast; our most effusive gratitude never softened his stony aloofness. Nan said with satisfaction that he was a perfect servant, and we all assented, though when Bert murmured "Perfect nuisance," our hearts secretly applauded. We were very uncomfortable. In short, we felt as though some proud scion of an ancient race had changed places with his menials to win a bet.

Sunday night Mr. Hammond came to dinner, and father, who evidently thought Bradley was infliction enough, said things in his throat that we discreetly didn't hear. The meal was going forward more or less stiffly. Bradley was doing dethroned royalty around the table, and most of us were trying to look as if we had forgotten him. Father wanted some cayenne pepper, but couldn't quite get his voice pitched to ask for it, and I was thirstily waiting for the Magnificent to see my empty glass. Barry was trying to explain to Nan why a yacht did not necessarily have to go the way the wind did.

"Here, I'll show you with a diagram,"

he said, and, after feeling in his pockets, turned to the butler.

"Bring me a piece of paper and a pencil," he said, as naturally as though Bradley were a maid of all work on four dollars a week. The Magnificent went for them with unexpected promptness, and in father's eyes there dawned a new expression. It was one of wonder, almost of respect.

Another incident, a few nights later, brought the same look back again. It was raining hard, and father and I were sitting in the library, from which we could get a clear view of the big front hall, when Barry Hammond called. Now, if there was one thing more than another that father loathed, it was to have Bradley help him on or off with his overcoat. He would use stratagem to avoid it. Sometimes he would grasp it, as though too hurried to stop, and put it on out of doors, and one cold day, when Bradley got there first, he muttered something about the heat and went off without it. When Bradley let in Barry Hammond, this particular night, I saw father lean forward and

watch with sudden interest. Barry presented his damp back to the Magnificent, as a matter of course, and let himself be peeled with an untroubled countenance. A moment later, the Magnificent was down on one knee, humbly removing the overshoes that covered Mr. Hammond's patent leathers. And Mr. Hammond's face was still serene. Father almost gasped aloud.

"Did you get wet?" I asked, as he came in.

"Very little, considering that I walked down," he answered, going to the fire. "Is Nan home?"

"H'm! So you are not afraid of a little rain?" said father, a trifle less ungraciously than usual.

"No; I like it," said Barry indifferently, quite unconscious of how he had helped on his cause.

Father did not refer to dudes after that, though he still held forth on his pet hobby of "a man who can handle other men knows his power and isn't afraid to use it"; for he

gloried more insistently in his down-town greatness now that the spell of Bradley lay heavy on the household. It was at dinner, a week or two later, that Barry played his master stroke. He was explaining how he came to be five minutes late.

"They were posting the winner of the Brooklyn, and I had to see who won," he said. Bradley was serving the soup, and I noticed that he grew suddenly attentive. It was the first human expression I had ever seen on his face. "You know, it's the big race of the year, Diamond against Nicholas, Jr.," Barry went on, turning to Nan. "I suppose thousands of dollars will change hands to-night. Earlier in the afternoon the news came that it was a dead heat, and would be left that way. Then there was some kind of a row, and it was finally decided to run the race over again." The butler, pausing behind Barry with a plate of soup, had grown rigid; his face was red, and the hand that held the plate shook. He was listening breathlessly. "You never saw such an excited crowd," Barry went on, all unconscious.

"They fairly went mad when the winner was posted——"

"Which got it?" broke in an excited voice, as a little stream of soup pattered down on the carpet. The Magnificent had forgotten himself.

There was a startled pause, then Barry turned his head and gave the man a cool, deliberate look. It was neither haughty nor reproving, but Bradley pulled himself together with a muttered apology, and went on serving the dinner with a humbled tread.

"And so, you see, I was late," Barry continued, to Nan.

As the others were leaving the dining room—I generally stayed with father while he smoked—the butler, with an apologetic movement, stopped Barry.

"I'm sure I beg your pardon, sir," he said, with an expression none of us had ever seen. "I had heard it was a dead heat, so I——"

"I think the apology should go to the head of the table," said Barry pleasantly.

"Oh, no, no—that's all right," said my father hastily, all ready to run.

Barry leaned his arms on the back of a chair.

"I suppose you know by this time that Diamond won?" he said. "Do you play the races much, Bradley?"

"Well, sir, I suppose so, a good deal. I can't seem to keep out of it."

"Did you drop much to-night?" Barry continued. Father was looking from one to the other with something like awe in his face.

"Pretty nearly everything I had, sir," was the despondent answer.

"I suppose you know what a fool you are to do it," Barry said.

"Well, sir, I think I'll keep away from it, for a while, anyway."

"I hope so," said Barry, with a nod, as he strolled off to find Nan.

Father smoked in meditative silence.

"I don't know but what there is something to that young man," he said at last. "He isn't—weak. Nan might do worse."

Barry came to him for his consent two days later. It was hard for father to give in completely.

"Nan's too young," he said decidedly. "Make it two years from now, or not at all."

Nan acquiesced to the delay with a calmness that irritated her fiancé. But that evening, when father and I were having his smoke, she came and dropped down beside him.

"Father," she said, "there is something I want to ask of you. I know it is selfish, but if I'm not married for two years, it won't matter to you yet. When we go to housekeeping I want you to let us have Bradley."

My father's face lit up with a look of absolute radiance.

"I know it is unfair of me when you are used to his ways," Nan went on; "but you'll have two years of him, anyway, and perhaps by——"

Father was looking ten years younger.

"Why, little daughter," he said, patting her hand, "of course, as you say, we're used to him, but still, if you want him, you

shall have him. We'll do all right. And I suppose," he added reflectively, "you'll be wanting money for your trousseau pretty soon. Young people always are in a hurry to get married!"

Nan was married three months later. The Magnificent went with her, and his place was filled by a pretty Irish girl, who inwardly and outwardly looks up to us. And we laugh and talk as in the old days, and put jelly on our bread and gravy on our potatoes, and eat our corn on the cob and our ice cream with a spoon and our little birds in our fingers in unruffled comfort.

Fred Richardson comes here now far more than he did in the old days, and father, supremely satisfied, says that when we are married we can have anything in the house but Maggie.

XVIII

The Thrifty Sarah

"It's a great year for mothers," said Sarah reflectively, as she divided the tiny steak with scrupulous exactness. "Ellen has brought hers on for six weeks, and Jean Humphreys has sent for hers, and Mrs. Torrey is visiting Isabel —she sleeps in the little room off the studio. Here, these peas are yours; I didn't order any. And Stella Brooks Livingston told me she was going to devote half her royalties this fall to her mother—bring her to town and get her clothes and take her to things. What has come over you all? Is it conscience?"

"Um—perhaps, a little," said Molly slowly, eating her canned peas with the vague indifference that testifies to a restaurant life. "That started it with me, when I found I couldn't get home. But it isn't all that, some way. I can't analyze, but it's something more."

"I think you are all simply reverting to parents." Sarah was eying her amusedly. "You have had your years of freedom and your work and your latch-keys, and now the glamour is wearing thin and you are turning back to home and mother. Or, rather, you are trying to compromise—to mix mother and freedom. It won't work, though—you can't do it. You won't acknowledge it, but you will all be frightfully relieved when you buy those dear old ladies their return tickets."

"Not at all!" Molly spoke with decision. "We shall have a beautiful time. First thing you know, you will be sending back for yours."

Sarah shook her head with a quick frown.

"Not I. She would loathe it. Besides, I am too busy to take her about." She shrugged away from the suggestion. "When is yours coming?"

"To-morrow. She is such a dear, Sarah! And think of having all one's stockings darned. I shall meet her at the train with

a work basket." Sarah glanced down thoughtfully in the direction of her own boots.

"There is something in that," she admitted. Then she laughed with a sudden idea. "I'll tell you—I will give you all a parents' party. Each guest must bring one mother, and only one. Wouldn't it be funny—the collection?"

"I think it would be very sweet and nice—not funny at all," Molly protested. "Go on and do it, Sarah. We'll come." Sarah sat smiling into her teacup.

"Can't you hear them? 'My Stella—' 'My Isabel—' 'My Molly—' If you were each one as brilliant as mother believes, what a glittering array it would be!" Sarah's inflection on the word "mother" reduced it to semi-humorous slang.

"Well, thank Heaven for one perfectly undiscriminating critic," said Molly, with a laugh. "Now I must get back to work. I am doing such a good wall paper, Sarah—the prettiest design I ever struck. You must have it when you build your country house."

"Thanks, I will," said Sarah. "Will five cents do for the tip? Well, ten, then—you're so lavish, Molly!"

They parted at the door, and Sarah turned to the bank to deposit a check she had received that morning. The growing pages of figures in her bank book gave her a little thrill of satisfaction as she walked home. They stood for freedom, clothes, books, opera, cabs, Europe even; it was worth while to live in two tiny rooms and let these be lean years of incessant work with that prosperous future piling up ahead of her.

"Some day Sarah will sit on a pink satin chair and dash off articles on a gold typewriter," the spendthrift Molly had prophesied—Molly, who, the instant she found herself ahead of her expenses, invited all her friends to dinner or brought one of her family down from the little country home for a week of city life. Sarah could see her scanning the amusement columns for plays suitable to a mother and joyfully bringing home surprises of silk blouses and lace stocks. She winced and

frowned sharply, thrusting the bank book into her desk.

"Mother would hate it; she'd be in terror of the streets, and the noise would drive her crazy," she argued, half aloud. "And going out to meals would be too hard for her. Oh, it wouldn't do at all!" And she turned resolutely to her work. But something made her cross that afternoon. She jerked impatiently at her papers, and once stopped to make some pencil calculations that had no bearing on her article.

A few days later, passing through a crowded shop, Sarah paused and smiled to herself at two figures bending absorbedly over an assortment of white lawn ties. Molly's mother was a gentle-looking little woman, whose quiet country garb had already begun to blossom out in spots with touches of city smartness. Molly was choosing and setting aside ties with lavish enjoyment.

"That is surely enough, dear girl!" her mother was saying as Sarah came up.

"This is the one who is going to give

the mothers' party," Molly supplemented her introduction. "I have told everyone about it, Sarah, so you can't back out."

"But, indeed, I don't want to back out," Sarah protested. The remark left a small sting. Had she, then, the name of being one who backed out? She did not often entertain, of course; perhaps she sometimes made impulsive suggestions for festivities that the cooler afterthought allowed to drop and be forgotten. But she was poor! And one had to put by money. It was crazy not to, when one worked so hard to get it. She had proved her point to her entire satisfaction by the time she reached home, but still the resentment lingered in her eyes, and before taking off her hat she sat down at her desk and wrote the notes of invitation to the mothers' party. The idea no longer amused her especially, but she was not going to have them say she backed out.

What they did actually say came to her with bitter suddenness the next afternoon in Isabel Torrey's studio. The world has a way of seeing the facts of our conduct and ignoring

the softening logic that explains them—sorely trying to one who is sensitive to public opinion. Isabel's big canvases, pulled out for exhibition, divided the studio into sections, and Sarah stood in the shadow of one when a group paused on its other side.

"But the thrifty Sarah giving the party —that is what amazes me," an amused voice was saying.

"Perhaps she has brought her own mother down," another voice suggested.

"Not Sarah! She prefers to lay up treasures in the Second National—wise girl."

"But that isn't the reason, Ellen," Molly's kindly voice broke in. "She told me herself her mother wouldn't like it—the noise and the way she lives and all that. She didn't think it would work—truly."

"'Thrift, thrift, Horatio,'" was the skeptical answer. "Sarah will be rich some day —but she won't be beloved. She didn't use to——"

The voices passed on, leaving Sarah white with anger. She slipped out and walked

home, her mind a bitter chaos of self-justification. They were unfair, they had no right! Why shouldn't she be careful of her money, she who worked so hard for it? She asked nothing of them; why should they sit up and judge her? She proclaimed fiercely that she did not care what they thought; yet through all her passionate resentment her mind kept returning to a picture that she had been learning not to see—a patient woman fitting her needs to her tiny income in a small, dull town and bravely agreeing that Sarah could not be expected to come home often. It was eight months since the last visit. Suddenly Sarah put her face in her hands and cried.

An hour later she wrote to her mother, inclosing a check for the journey. "I shall expect you to stay a week," she said, and mailed the letter with a lightening heart. "I'll show them," she muttered, recollection bringing back a flash of resentment to her eyes.

After all, it was pleasanter than she had suspected—to have a mother coming. Perhaps that picture she had been forgetting had

troubled her more than she realized. Sarah started to prepare one of her two tiny rooms, then went boldly out and hired a large and comfortable room across the hall. This led to several minor purchases, and a surprise or two. She hummed over her preparations and undid her packages with a thrill of satisfaction. She was glad she had a handsome new gown coming home; her mother would find it dazzling. And she herself should have a new bonnet or something. Sarah's blood tingled with the forgotten joy of giving. Her head was full of plans when she opened her mother's answer two days later, and sat down to read it.

My Dear, Generous Girl: How I wish I could! But your Aunt Bessie cannot do the work, and you see, dear, we don't keep help any more. I can't quite understand it, and Mr. Jordan says it will come out all right, but just now we don't get any income, and so for six months your Aunt Bessie and I have done what we could, but we are not so strong as we were, and the hot summer was hard on your aunt. I did not mean to tell you, dear, you work so

hard and have quite enough on your mind, but I could not leave your aunt to do all the work, for lodgers do make dirt, and we give them their breakfast. They are very nice and respectful to us, so you need not mind, though I did not mean to tell you. Besides, I have not anything fit to wear in a city except my black silk, though my old alpaca does well enough here. Don't worry about me, Sarah. Mr. Jordan says he may have it straightened out by New Year's. If you don't mind, I will keep the check for the grocer—we could not help falling behind a little. I hope you won't be angry about the lodgers. They have the two west rooms, and are always polite. I wish I could see you, my dear girl. Sometimes I realize that I am becoming an old woman. I should have enjoyed your party for the mothers. It was a kind idea.

Your loving MOTHER.

P. S.—You are not to be troubled about me, but I had to tell you, to explain why I could not come.

The letter slipped from Sarah's hand and she sat staring fixedly in front of her. For six months—all her own work—and lodgers.

Sarah's thoughts turned to the gifts she had felt so generous in buying—a pair of gloves, four handkerchiefs, and a veil. The color flushed to the edges of her hair. Some one knocked and a box was handed her. She opened it absently, to see the shining folds of the gown she had absolutely had to have. The bill lay on top—ninety-five dollars. Sarah covered it hastily, and read the letter through again, unsparingly. Then she started up with a little cry of pain.

"Oh, how could I! How could I!" she whispered. She turned impetuously to her desk to write and her eyes fell on a time-table. She caught it up, and a moment later was thrusting things into a traveling bag and pining on her hat with shaking fingers.

The night of the mothers' party, each arrival had a cordial "Oh!" of surprise to find an elderly woman presiding with Sarah—a woman with a worn face, but with sweet, kind eyes that once or twice seemed near tears and a smile tremulous with some inner happiness.

"I am to stay a month," she told them,

and evidently held back other pleasant secrets by main force.

"The thrifty Sarah is a good sort—I take it all back," some one murmured, turning away from the bright old face.

"I told you she was," answered Molly triumphantly. And Sarah, watching them, knew what had been said, and wondered if it would always hurt like this.

THE END

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